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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	03/11 China locks down 9M amid surge in cases
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-china-changchun-fbe63032924a44e4f7874d0bf0a2988f

GIST	<p>BEIJING (AP) — China on Friday ordered a lockdown of the 9 million residents of the northeastern city of Changchun amid a new spike in COVID-19 cases in the area attributed to the highly contagious omicron variant.</p> <p>Residents are required to remain home, with one family member permitted to venture out to buy food and other necessities every two days. All residents must undergo three rounds of mass testing, while non-essential businesses have been closed and transport links suspended.</p> <p>The latest lockdowns, which also include Yucheng with 500,000 people in the eastern province of Shandong, show China is sticking to the draconian approach to the pandemic it has enforced for most of the past two years, despite some earlier indications that authorities would be implementing more targeted measures.</p> <p>China reported another 397 cases of local transmission nationwide on Friday, 98 of them in Jilin province that surrounds Changchun, a center of the country's auto industry. In the entire province, cases have exceeded 1,100 since the latest outbreak first struck late last week.</p> <p>Just two cases were reported within Changchun itself on Friday, bringing its total to 78 in recent days. Authorities have repeatedly pledged to lock down any community where one or more cases are found under China's "zero tolerance" approach to the pandemic.</p> <p>Another 93 cases were confirmed in the nearby city of Jilin that bears the same name as the surrounding province. Authorities have already ordered a partial lockdown in the city and severed travel links with other cities.</p> <p>Officials of the Jilin Agricultural Science and Technology University have been sacked after a cluster of infections was reported on campus and students complained on social media that those who tested positive were being confined in school libraries and other buildings in poor conditions.</p> <p>The school has registered 74 confirmed cases and transferred more than 6,000 people to quarantine, according to state broadcaster CCTV.</p> <p>Aerial images showed students in hazmat suits lining up in the cold and dark waiting to be transferred.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/11 Russia strikes western Ukraine
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-kyiv-business-forests-war-crimes-be25927bc5eef0f90cf466a86fcc6e3f
GIST	<p>LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia widened its military offensive in Ukraine on Friday, striking near airports in the west of the country for the first time, as observers and satellite photos indicated that its troops, long stalled in a convoy outside the capital Kyiv, were maneuvering in an attempt to encircle the city.</p> <p>The U.S. and its allies prepared to step up their efforts to isolate and sanction Russia by revoking its most favored trading status. But with the invasion now in its third week, the new moves on the ground pointed to Russia forces trying to regroup, bombarding new cities as they tightened their 10-day-old siege on the key Ukrainian port city of Mariupol, where tens of thousands were struggling to find food.</p> <p>The new airstrikes in western Ukraine were likely a message from Russia that no area was safe. Western and Ukrainian officials have said the Russian forces have struggled in the face of heavier-than-expected resistance and supply and morale problems. So far, they have made the most advances on cities in the south and east while stalling in the north and around Kyiv.</p> <p>Strikes on the western Lutsk airfield killed four Ukrainian servicemen and wounded six, according to Lutsk Mayor Ihor Polishchuk. In Ivano-Frankivsk, residents were ordered to shelters after an air raid alert, Mayor Ruslan Martsinkiv said.</p>

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said Russia used high-precision long-range weapons Friday to put military airfields in Lutsk and Ivano-Frankivsk “out of action.” He did not provide details.

In another potentially ominous movement, new satellite photos appeared to show that the massive Russian convoy outside the Ukrainian capital had fanned out into nearby towns and forests.

Howitzers were towed into positions to open fire, and armored units were seen in towns near the the Antonov Airport north of the city, according to Maxar Technologies, the company that produced the images.

The 40-mile (64-kilometer) line of vehicles, tanks and artillery had massed outside Kyiv early last week. But its advance had appeared to stall amid reports of food and fuel shortages while Ukrainian troops also targeted it with anti-tank missiles.

The new moves suggest the convoy forces were now moving west around the city, making their way south to encircle it,, according to Jack Watling, a research fellow at British defense think-tank Royal United Services Institute.

“They’re about half-way around now,” he told BBC radio. He said they were likely preparing for a “siege rather than assault” on Kyiv because of continuing low morale and logistical problems. A missile Friday hit the town of Baryshivka, on Kyiv’s eastern perimeter, significantly damaging buildings, according to the regional administration.

The British Ministry of Defense said that after making “limited progress,” Russian forces were trying to “re-set and re-posture” their troops, gearing up for operations against Kyiv.

Moscow also indicated it plans to bring fighters from Syria into the conflict.

Russian President Vladimir Putin approved bringing in “volunteer” fighters and told his defense minister to help them “move to the combat zone.” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirmed the “volunteers” include fighters from Syria.

Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said Russia knew of “more than 16,000 applications” from countries in the Middle East, many of them from people he said had helped Russia against the Islamic State group, according to a Kremlin transcript.

Since 2015, Russian forces have backed Syrian President Assad against various groups opposed to his rule, including Islamic State. Opposition activists in Syria have also reported Russian recruitment efforts in the country for the Ukraine war. But they estimate the number of volunteers so far is in the hundreds or a few thousand.

Revoking Russia’s “most favored nation” trade status by the U.S. and other nations would allow higher tariffs to be imposed on some Russian imports. Western sanctions have already dealt a severe blow to Russia, causing the ruble to plunge, foreign businesses to flee and prices to rise sharply.

Putin has insisted Russia can endure sanctions. After meeting in Moscow with the president of Belarus, Putin said there have been “certain positive developments” in Russia-Ukraine negotiations. But he offered no details.

Meanwhile, the offensive on Ukrainian cities has expanded.

In Syria, Russia backed the government in imposing long, brutal sieges on opposition-held cities, wreaking heavy destruction on residential area and causing widespread civilian casualties. That history, along with the ongoing siege of the Azov Sea port of Mariupol, has raised fears of similar bloodshed in Ukraine.

Russian airstrikes Friday targeted for the first time the eastern city of Dnipro, a major industrial hub and Ukraine's fourth-largest city in a strategic position on the Dnieper River. Three strikes hit, killing at least one person, according to Ukrainian Interior Ministry adviser Anton Heraschenko.

In images of the strikes' aftermath released by Ukraine's state emergency agency, firefighters doused a flaming building and scattered ash fell on bloodied rubble. Smoke billowed over shattered concrete and collapsed sidings where buildings once stood.

The Ukrainian general staff said Friday that the attacks in the west and in Dnipro were launched because the Russians were "unable to succeed" on other fronts. It said Russian efforts Friday remain concentrated around Kyiv and Mariupol, and that Russian forces are regrouping in the north and around the eastern cities of Sumy and Kharkiv.

Temperatures sank below freezing across most of Ukraine and were forecast to hit -13 degrees Celsius (8 Fahrenheit) in Kharkiv, which has come under heavy bombardment. Some 400 apartment buildings were cut off from heating supplies, and Kharkiv Mayor Ihor Terekhov appealed to remaining residents to descend into the subway system or other underground shelters where authorities and volunteers were distributing blankets and hot food.

A deadly strike on a maternity hospital in Mariupol this week sparked international outrage and charges of a possible war crime.

Mariupol residents said bombardment continued Friday. Konashenkov, the Russian Defense Ministry spokesman, said Russian-backed fighters have advanced up to 800 meters from Mariupol from the east, north and west, further squeezing the city which has the Azov Sea to its south. He said the advance was being conducted by fighters from the separatist-held Donetsk region, the standard Russian line for fighting in the east.

Ukrainian authorities are planning to send aid to Mariupol, home to some 430,000, Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said in a video message.

Repeated previous attempts have failed as aid and rescue convoys were targeted by Russian shelling, even as residents have grown more desperate, scrounging for food and fuel.

More than 1,300 people have died in the siege, Vereshchuk said. "They want to destroy the people of Mariupol. They want to make them starve," she added. "It's a war crime."

Residents have no heat or phone service. Bodies are being buried in mass graves. Grocery stores and pharmacies were emptied days ago by people breaking in to get supplies, according to a local official with the Red Cross, Sacha Volkov. A black market is operating for vegetables, meat is unavailable, Volkov said.

Residents, Volkov said, are turning on one another: "People started to attack each other for food."

Vereshchuk also announced efforts to create new humanitarian corridors to bring aid to people in areas occupied or under Russian attack around the cities of Kherson in the south, Chernihiv in the north and Kharkiv in the east.

Some 2.5 million people have fled Ukraine since the invasion began, the International Organization for Migration said Friday. Millions more have been driven from their homes. Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said about 2 million people, half the metropolitan area's population, have left the capital.

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HEADLINE	03/10 Study: Covid death toll 3 times higher
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/covid-pandemic-deaths-18-million-study/

GIST

Two years after the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus a [global pandemic](#), new research suggests around 18.2 million people have died worldwide as a result. That toll is more than three times higher than the WHO's [tally](#) of nearly [6 million](#) officially reported [COVID-19 deaths](#) through the end of 2021.

Some 1.13 million Americans have died due to the pandemic, the researchers estimate. By comparison, the [current total](#) of reported COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. stands at around 960,000.

The new figures, published Thursday [in The Lancet](#), are based on the number of "excess deaths" in countries around the world. Researchers determined how many additional deaths occurred from January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2021 by modeling the number of "expected" deaths in years unaffected by a global pandemic, compared to the total number who actually died from any cause.

The estimate predates the Omicron variant's peak in many countries, which drove large waves of deaths in the U.S. and elsewhere over the past few months.

Many of the additional deaths over the past two years can be directly linked to cases of COVID-19. However, the study's authors say a variety of other factors — ranging from underreporting of infections to the disease's strain on hospitals — may account for the unprecedented number of additional deaths during the pandemic.

"Further research will help to reveal how many deaths were caused directly by COVID-19, and how many occurred as an indirect result of the pandemic," the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation's Dr. Haidong Wang, the paper's lead author, said in a release.

While the U.S. overall does not rank among the nations with the world's worst rates of excess mortality, it does have one of the largest total numbers of excess deaths in the study. The pandemic's biggest cumulative toll came from India, the U.S., Russia, Mexico, Brazil, Indonesia and Pakistan.

"These seven countries accounted for more than half of the global excess deaths due to COVID-19 over the 24-month period," the study's authors wrote.

Researchers noted that some southern U.S. states ranked among the world's worst excess mortality rates from COVID-19.

For every 100,000 residents, an estimated 329.7 additional deaths occurred in Mississippi during the pandemic, the highest of any state. In the study's global estimates, only 21 nations exceeded 300 excess deaths per 100,000 citizens.

More than 12,000 residents of Mississippi have died from COVID-19, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's official [tally](#), the most per capita of any state.

"I think this paper highlights the importance of using excess deaths in the analysis of the effects of any sort of pandemic or epidemic like this, in order to get a sense of the true, complete impact," says Robert Anderson, chief of the CDC's mortality statistics branch.

The study published Thursday echoes similar figures that have been generated by Anderson's team, which has been calculating [excess deaths](#) on a weekly basis throughout the pandemic in the U.S.

"You see for some of these countries, there are very few numbers of COVID deaths but quite large numbers of excess deaths. That doesn't suffer from errors in cause of death certification. A death is a death, and it's pretty easy to tell if people are dead even if it's not that easy to tell what they died from," Anderson said.

Based on data through January 2022, the CDC's own estimate of excess deaths during the pandemic passed 1 million earlier this year. Other [ongoing research](#) by the agency suggests the number of Americans who have been infected by the coronavirus could be double that of official reports.

The CDC's current excess deaths figure may include some fatalities from other disasters that occurred during the past two years, Anderson noted, like the [winter storm in Texas](#) that led to crippling blackouts. However, the vast majority of additional deaths have come from COVID-19 cases, which [ranks](#) among the country's [leading causes of death](#).

The agency has also seen substantial swings in other causes of death over the past two years, which might also be linked to the virus or its ripple effects.

Deaths from heart attacks and stroke have climbed beyond pre-pandemic levels, Anderson cited as examples, as well as deaths from dementia and Alzheimer's disease. COVID-19 has been linked to both [cardiovascular](#) and [neurological](#) issues, as well as disrupting the ability of doctors to care for non-COVID patients during surges.

"We've seen some decline in chronic obstructive pulmonary disease deaths, and that may be related to the pandemic as well. These people are generally at high-risk for serious effects of COVID, and so it's possible they may have died otherwise without the pandemic as a result of COPD," said Anderson.

Looking ahead, Anderson said the CDC planned to continue to regularly release data but may soon wind down the resource-intensive weekly estimates it has been publishing on excess deaths in the pandemic.

Anderson predicted the agency may eventually begin to account for some COVID-19 deaths as part of the expected baseline deaths every year. The CDC already analyzes changes in mortality with flu and other endemic diseases, compared to expected deaths.

Given the length of the pandemic so far, Anderson's team [had to tweak](#) their algorithm last year to stabilize their estimates, incorporating additional pre-pandemic historical data.

"When we're modeling these data to try to get at how many deaths would have occurred in a 'normal' year, you have to model a certain number of years of data. And of course, you don't want to include the data of the non-normal years in the model," said Anderson.

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HEADLINE	03/10 IRS plan: hire 5,000; need no tax experience
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/tax-return-backlog-irs-hiring-5000-workers-no-tax-experience-needed/
GIST	<p>The IRS started the current tax season with a massive backlog of tax returns, prompting the National Taxpayer Advocate to describe the agency as "in crisis." Now, the IRS says it has a plan to work through its current backlog of 7.2 million filings: Hire 5,000 workers this month — no tax experience necessary.</p> <p>The tax agency on Thursday said it will hold job fairs on March 16, 23 and 30 at its processing centers in Austin, Texas; Kansas City, Missouri; and Ogden, Utah. Applicants will be offered jobs on the spot, the agency said.</p> <p>"Available positions include temporary, term and permanent jobs. Many are entry-level clerk and tax examiner positions in the Wage and Investment Division," the agency said. "No prior tax experience is required."</p> <p>The Wage and Investment Division handles tasks including processing taxpayer submissions and payments, as well as providing filers with updates about the status of their returns.</p> <p>The IRS is attempting to make a major hiring push at a time when the labor market is historically tight, with not enough workers to fill the nation's current pool of 11.3 million open positions. Workers are also</p>

engaged in the so-called "Great Resignation," with many quitting their jobs in search of better pay and opportunities.

The IRS might struggle to lure workers based on pay alone: Federal workers are guaranteed a minimum wage of at least [\\$15 an hour](#). Annual pay rates being dangled by the IRS range from about \$23,000 to up to about \$47,000.

The agency may find that competition for talent is fierce at a time when [employers are raising pay](#) to entice job candidates.

"Those who wish to work with customer service as their focus are encouraged to apply," Ken Corbin, IRS taxpayer experience officer and wage and investment commissioner, said in a statement. "This is gratifying work — as these newly hired individuals will process tax returns and deliver refunds to the nation's taxpayers."

Once given an offer, applicants should expect to begin work at the IRS within 30 to 45 days, the agency said.

Another 5,000 hires in 2023

The IRS said it also plans to hire another 5,000 workers in 2023.

Since about 82,000 workers were employed at the IRS in fiscal year 2021, an increase of 10,000 employees within two years would represent a significant boost to the agency's workforce. It could also return the agency to its 2010 level of about 94,000 employees.

Separately, the IRS said it has also started to use voice and chat bots on two of its toll-free telephone assistance lines and at IRS.gov, which it said will help taxpayers get answers quickly. That comes after only 1 in 10 phone calls [got through to an IRS employee](#) last season, leading to frustration among taxpayers trying to get answers about their refund delays.

The IRS said the bots can answer questions about making one-time payments, provide answers to FAQs and clarify collection notices.

The agency said the voice bots will handle more complicated issues later this year, such as authenticating a user's identity to create a payment plan, request a transcript and get information about their accounts.

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HEADLINE	03/10 Florida: 6 spring breakers fentanyl OD
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/possible-fentanyl-overdose-6-students-spring-break-florida-hospitals/
GIST	<p>Wilton Manors, Florida — Six students on spring break overdosed on what appeared to be cocaine laced with fentanyl and were hospitalized in Fort Lauderdale Thursday, and one was in critical condition, CBS Miami reports. It happened at an Airbnb.</p> <p>Four went into cardiac arrest after ingesting the drug before two friends tried to help by performing CPR. That's when they were also exposed to the drug, the station says.</p> <p>Fort Lauderdale Fire Department Battalion Chief Steve Gollan told CBS Miami five were in stable condition.</p> <p>Gollan told WPLG-TV the opioid-overdose-reversing drug naloxone was administered.</p> <p>"These are healthy young adults, college students in the prime of their life," Gollan said. "Getting this drug into their system, it's unknown what the recovery will be on the critical individual."</p>

	<p>He told CBS Miami the incident "brings great concern that there could be other ODs over the next couple of days. Obviously if there's a bad batch, it's not isolated just to one buyer. It normally goes to everyone that purchases that same substance from whoever they got it from."</p> <p>One neighbor observed to CBS Miami that, "They seem like good kids, typical college kids. Rowdy in the pool, but they don't deserve this."</p> <p>Fentanyl is an unpredictable and powerful synthetic painkiller blamed for driving an increase in fatal drug overdoses. It's 50 to 100 times stronger than morphine and used to treat severe pain, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says. It also slows a person's breathing and heart rate.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Decades of business ties with Russia cut
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/news/2022/03/ukraine-invasion-severs-decades-wa-business-ties-russia
GIST	<p>After the Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991, many Washington industries — from apples to airplanes — considered Russia a promising market.</p> <p>But doing business with that country grew increasingly difficult as Vladimir Putin's Russian government pushed its political ambitions. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is expected to further deteriorate any remaining economic ties.</p> <p>Washington's iconic apple crop offers a stark example of this international business roller coaster.</p> <p>Until a few years ago, Russian consumers paid a premium for large-sized Washington state apples.</p> <p>That was great for growers who had a hard time selling such big apples in the U.S., said Mark Powers, president of the Northwest Horticultural Council, which represents the Northwest tree fruit industry on public policy issues, such as trade.</p> <p>"Our Washington state apples and pears were considered a premium brand, and there was a lot of good demand for the product we were growing," Powers said. "If you're thinking about volume, [Russia] would be considered a small market — but that doesn't give it credit to the value of that market."</p> <p>According to data compiled by the Washington State Department of Agriculture, Washington state exported upwards of \$12.7 million of apples and \$10.3 million of pears to Russia in 2013.</p> <p>But Washington state apples shipped to Russia declined in 2014. That year, Russia invaded and annexed Crimea from Ukraine.</p> <p>Following the annexation, the U.S. responded with targeted sanctions, namely on assets owned by Putin's inner circle. But Russia struck back with much more widespread sanctions, including a ban of many U.S. agricultural products, such as the large Washington apples their citizens had enjoyed. From 2015 on, not a single Washington apple has been sold inside Russia's borders.</p> <p>Along with any economic sanctions the U.S. has imposed on Russia in response to the invasion of Ukraine, many private companies have severed ties with Russian companies or suspended operations in the country on their own accord, said Derek Norberg. He runs the Council for U.S.-Russian Relations in Seattle, which has worked on strengthening ties between the two countries, namely through efforts involving economic growth and community improvement.</p> <p>Aerospace manufacturer Boeing, for example, will no longer purchase titanium from Russia, has suspended operations in Moscow and for the time being will no longer provide parts, maintenance and technical support services for Russian airlines, according to a company statement.</p>

“I just don’t see a lot of opportunities or will on either side to have business relationships sustained at this point,” Norberg said. “The U.S. government is putting sanctions in place. Even if they don’t prohibit business activity, I think the wish seemingly of the administration is that U.S. businesses on their own, even if not specifically prohibited by sanction, will choose not to do business with Russia.”

A once-promising market

For Carol Vipperman, seeing businesses, including those in Washington state, cut ties with Russia is a sad ending to decades of developing business and community relationships with the Russian people, including those in the government.

From 1989 to 2011, Vipperman was executive director of the Foundation for Russian-American Economic Cooperation, a Seattle-based nonprofit that worked to increase economic ties between Russia and the U.S., including businesses in the Pacific Northwest.

Much of that business activity was in the far eastern parts of Russia, namely the lands along the north Pacific Ocean the Russian city of Vladivostok near South Korea and Japan. The area was accessible to Pacific Northwest businesses — during the 1990s Alaska Airlines [operated flights](#) from Seattle to several far eastern Russian cities via Anchorage, a noteworthy development at the time.

Much of the economic activity was around oil. Other natural resource sectors, such as agriculture, also ramped up activity in Russia — both in the country's Far East and in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Vipperman’s organization was funded primarily by government grants through the U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID, an indicator of better bilateral relations between the two countries.

Back then, many believed developing and strengthening business relationships was a stabilizing force in U.S.-Russian relations, she said.

Some of the Foundation for Russian-American Economic Cooperation work extended beyond business and into community development. The group's activities included organizing health fairs in Russia and civic partnerships between cities in Washington state and the Russian Far East.

Powers said the Northwest fruit industry’s work in Russia included efforts to improve the country’s supply chain, such as resolving congestion at the port in St. Petersburg.

“Everyone wanted to see a stable Russia,” Vipperman said. “Everyone was interested in the county becoming open and hopefully democratic. They also wanted to support their own businesses in the U.S.”

And that feeling was once mutual.

“The Russian businesses were eager to have ties to the West,” she said. “They were eager to have opportunities.”

Dwindling relationship

Over time, it grew harder for U.S. businesses, especially smaller ones, to do business in Russia. The Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s led to many business deals falling through from a lack of money. Alaska Airlines ended flights to Russia around that time.

And as political relations soured, the U.S. government’s desire and ability to financially support business initiatives in Russia declined.

Vipperman said that as grant funding declined, she and her board members agreed that it had to end the foundation’s operations. As she was closing her organization in the fall of 2011, she noted one political development — Putin’s announcement that he would run for president again.

“I knew, right then and there, things were not going to go well,” she said.

Indeed, in the months following the foundation's closure, the Russian government shut down activities of the U.S. Agency for International Development. Three years later, Russia annexed Crimea.

In retrospect, the retaliatory actions by Russia were much broader and harsher than the sanctions by the U.S., said Norberg, who had worked at Vipperman's foundation before continuing his work with the Council for U.S.- Russian Relations.

Russia often spun its actions, such as the widespread ban of U.S. agricultural products, as an effort to increase domestic production of goods it had imported from elsewhere, he said.

And while the U.S. sanctions in 2014 proved to be weak and ineffective, it's clear the Russian government saw a need to protect themselves from further economic vulnerability, said Debra Glassman, a teaching professor of business and finance at the University of Washington.

"The lesson the Russian government took from that experience is they should be as sanction-proof as possible," she said.

Exports from Washington state to Russia decreased drastically in recent years — from a peak of \$2.1 billion in 2014 to just \$310 million in 2021, according to trade data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Most exports — \$204 million — were in transportation equipment, likely planes and parts from Boeing and the state's aerospace industry.

Export of agricultural products, which have been largely banned in Russia, declined from the \$20 million to \$28 million range in the early 2010s to around \$1 million in 2021.

For Powers, while Russia wasn't a huge market for Washington apples and pears, it was still a valuable one, and the ban did have adverse effects.

Larger apples "can go into other markets, but they have to be discounted," he said.

Imports of Russian products into Washington state have fluctuated over the years, but two categories have been constant — oil and gas and fishing.

In 2021, the two categories together accounted for \$1.53 billion of the \$1.84 billion of Russian imports to the state.

Much of the seafood brought into Washington state — and eventually transported to other parts of the country — included crab, in response to a shortage in the U.S., said Robert Hamilton, adviser for trade policy for Gov. Jay Inslee.

While most of the crude oil processed in the state's five refineries came from Alaska, North Dakota and Alberta, they still received about 10 million barrels of crude oil from Russia in 2021, [according to an analysis](#) by Zane Gustafson of the Sightline Institute, a Seattle-based think tank.

The analysis showed that most of that crude oil, 60%, went to one refiner, Tesoro/Marathon Anacortes.

"Cascadia's oil imports have generated just a sliver of Russia's oil revenue, but they are a reminder that our status quo energy economy ties us to the ugly geopolitics of petrostates. The faster Cascadia gets off fossil fuels, the sooner we can stop financially enabling Russian aggression," Gustafson wrote in the analysis.

Cutting ties

On Tuesday, President Joe Biden issued an executive order to ban Russian energy imports, including crude oil. Biden said he took action after seeing bipartisan support for such a ban. The U.S. also imposed financial sanctions, including one on Russia's Central Bank.

In addition, legislation has been proposed in Congress to end normal trade relations with Russia, which could enable an increase in tariffs for Russian imports. Another measure before Congress would call for kicking Russia out of the World Trade Organization, which facilitates trade between countries. However, the U.S. can't make such a decision unilaterally, said Hamilton, Inslee's trade policy advisor.

Closer to home, there are efforts to cut Russian business ties, although most actions must be approved or initiated at the federal level.

Inslee issued a declaration stating his intent to conduct a review to identify any contracts, investments and relationships between the state executive branch's agencies and Russian state institutions and companies, with the intention to sever those relationships eventually.

Several state legislators [introduced a bill](#) last week that would cancel contracts with Russian companies and divert any pension money and investments in Russian companies. However, the state Legislature does not have much time to take action, with the regular session ending today.

Given the actions both by the government and private companies, Russia could end up in a situation only a handful of countries — namely Iran and Cuba — have been in, Norberg said.

The U.S. has largely given up on business as a means to stabilize bilateral relations, he believes. And that reality is hitting Norberg at home. He plans on ending operations of both the Council for U.S.-Russia Relations and the Russian American Pacific Partnership forum organized by his organization.

The calls to his office from businesses looking to enter the Russian market have declined. There is little funding from the private sector or the U.S. government to keep his organization going.

"When Putin essentially did what we thought was the unthinkable — the full-scale invasion of Ukraine — that interest to [keep] those relations maintained [is] largely gone," he said.

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HEADLINE	03/10 Situation at Chernobyl deteriorating
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/the-situation-at-chernobyl-is-deteriorating/
GIST	<p>TWO WEEKS AGO, Russian forces seized control of the defunct Chernobyl, once the site of the world's worst nuclear meltdown, and Zaporizhzhia, Europe's biggest active nuclear power plant, raising concerns of nuclear risks in the middle of a war zone.</p> <p>Although Chernobyl's last reactor went offline in 2000, the site now serves as a nuclear waste storage facility—and a highly contaminated one. The situation there is deteriorating; the facility lost power on Wednesday, and backup diesel generators have only enough fuel for two days. The 210 technical personnel and guards have not been allowed to rotate out to rest. The UN's International Atomic Energy Agency, which promotes the peaceful use of nuclear energy and prevents nuclear weapon proliferation, says it lost contact with Chernobyl's radiation monitoring systems on Tuesday. Unless officials can restore power, experts fear Chernobyl could once again become the site of a nuclear calamity.</p> <p>"To have a long-term loss of power is certainly a concern," says Ed Lyman, a senior global security scientist at the Union of Concerned Scientists and coauthor of the book <i>Fukushima: The Story of a Nuclear Disaster</i>. Some of Chernobyl's waste has been transferred into dry casks, but considerable quantities of fuel rods remain in a pool that requires cooling. That's where the biggest risks currently are. "Without electrical power to the cooling pumps, the spent fuel pool will start heating up," Lyman says. Water will gradually evaporate or boil away, exposing the fuel rods and releasing radioactive gasses.</p>

Chernobyl's New Safe Confinement structure also needs electricity. This is the facility built around the concrete "sarcophagus" that surrounds what's left of the damaged reactor Number Four, which melted down in the 1986 disaster. The confinement structure's ventilation system must run to prevent the exposed nuclear fuel within it from becoming more hazardous. Without power, the site's 1.5-billion-euro decommissioning program could be imperiled, Claire Corkhill, an expert on nuclear material degradation at the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom, wrote on [Twitter](#) and in an email to WIRED.

Some experts worry more about the personnel, who haven't been able to leave after their shifts, which normally would have ended two weeks ago. "I'm concerned about the poor and heroic staff workers, and whether they're in a good mental state to run all the equipment," says Ferenc Dalnoki-Veress, a scientist-in-residence and nuclear physicist at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey. He likened them to stressed and sleep-deprived passenger jet pilots flying in a combat zone. "You wouldn't want to be flying in that airplane," he says.

Not everyone agrees on the level of danger now posed by Chernobyl. Lyman estimates that if the cooling system isn't running the way it's supposed to, there's a window of at least a couple of weeks before the threat of meltdown arises.

Dalnoki-Veress thinks it might be months until the risk becomes high. On Wednesday, Rafael Mariano Grossi, director-general of the IAEA, [tweeted](#) that so far there is "no critical impact on safety," although in a [press statement](#) the agency said that "the lack of power is likely to lead to a further deterioration of operational radiation safety at the site." But on the same day, Ukrainian foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba [wrote on Twitter](#) that the limited power to cooling systems makes "radiation leaks imminent."

Lyman believes this range of assessments is understandable. "The Ukrainians are good-intentioned, but I feel like they're possibly using rhetoric that's pretty alarming," he says, adding that it makes sense that they would want to draw attention to the possibility of a nuclear crisis. "They certainly have the right to play this card, given what the country has endured and the fact that it's had to cope with this contaminated site for so long."

Plus, he says, Russian forces are violating [rules](#) that the IAEA has established for nuclear safety and security, such as that monitoring equipment needs to be fully functional, staff need to be able to safely fulfill their duties without pressure, and [power supply from the grid](#) needs to be maintained. Lyman notes that when he last visited Chernobyl's "exclusion zone" in 2006, he had to go through a standard radiation control checkpoint on the way out, with checks for nuclear contamination on people's bodies or clothing to prevent the spread of radioactive materials. But it's possible that Russian soldiers are indiscriminately moving into and out of that hazardous area, he says.

And that's not the only way Russian troops appear to have been reckless. A training building outside the perimeter of the Zaporizhzhia plant [caught fire last Friday](#) after a Russian attack, and now operators have shut down all but two reactors there. Then the Kharkiv Institute of Physics and Technology's nuclear research facility and neutron-generating accelerator—developed in collaboration with the US Department of Energy's Argonne National Laboratory—was damaged earlier this week, [according to the IAEA](#). (The neutron generator likely isn't a radiation threat, however.)

"The Russians have been incredibly careless. They not only attacked a nuclear power plant; they also attacked a nuclear laboratory, an accelerator complex that's designed to produce neutrons," says Bob Rosner, a physicist at the University of Chicago and former chair of the [Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists'](#) Science and Security Board.

And the threat won't be over as long as Russia continues to bombard Ukraine with missiles and fly warplanes overhead. US Department of Energy researchers have studied whether nuclear reactors could withstand an airplane crash, Dalnoki-Veress says. They cannot. And missiles fly faster and are more penetrating. An impact on a fuel pool could be highly damaging, likely spreading dangerous radioactive material all over. That's why prohibiting combat near nuclear facilities should be a top priority in Ukraine-

	Russia negotiations, Dalnoki-Veress argues: “No reactor in the world can withstand a missile strike. It’s important to not have any fighting near these facilities. It’s a no-brainer.”
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HEADLINE	03/11 Travel restrictions fail stop new variants
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/transportation/research-says-travel-restrictions-fail-to-stop-new-covid-19-variants/
GIST	<p>The International Air Transport Association (IATA) says analysis has shown that travel restrictions failed to prevent the spread of new COVID-19 variants.</p> <p>The association points to new research from OXERA and Edge Health that shows that even if a new variant is discovered and travel restrictions introduced immediately, this only delays the peak of infections by a maximum of only four days.</p> <p>According to the research, by the time that a new variant emerges, is identified, and restrictions are put in place, the variant is likely already circulating in communities around the world. In a scenario where restrictions are delayed by a week from identification, the peak in infections per 100,000 people is only delayed by a maximum of two days.</p> <p>In light of these findings, IATA and Airports Council International Europe have called for all remaining COVID restrictions applying to intra-EU and Schengen area travel to be dropped, including all testing requirements, the need to present proof of vaccination, or complete a Passenger Locator Form (PLF). This includes dropping mask-wearing for travel within or between States where it is no longer required in other indoor environments.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 CIA: China alarmed by Russia brutality
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/articles/2022-03-10/u-s-intel-china-alarmed-by-russian-brutality-in-ukraine
GIST	<p>The brutality of President Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine has “unsettled” President Xi Jinping and spurred fissures between Russia and China, U.S. intelligence believes, undermining concerted public efforts by the two powers to appear aligned in their respective efforts to grab power internationally.</p> <p>Despite heavy Chinese investments in its partnership with Russia in recent years, “the Chinese leadership, President Xi in particular, is unsettled by what he’s seeing” in Europe, CIA Director William Burns told Congress on Thursday, following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on a scale unseen on the continent since World War II.</p> <p>“His own intelligence doesn’t appear to have told him what was going to happen,” Burns said of Xi, citing also the Chinese Communist Party leader’s new concerns about “the reputational damage that China suffers by associating with the ugliness of Russia’s aggression with Ukraine.”</p> <p>Burns’ comments to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, as a part of annual hearings regarding threats to the U.S., represent the first major public assessment of what China knew in advance of Russia’s assault on its former Soviet ally. And they signal troubling tensions between Moscow and the Chinese financial juggernaut that Putin appears to have believed would bail out Russia in the wake of predictable Western economic sanctions.</p> <p>The CIA director similarly cast doubt on those assumptions from the Kremlin. He cited Beijing’s stinginess with Moscow in negotiating new pipelines following the international fallout it faced from forcibly annexing the Crimean Peninsula in 2014.</p>

“They weren’t particularly flexible or sympathetic in a way during that period,” Burns said. “I suspect there’s not going to be an easy way out for President Putin as he looks to try to deal with these economic consequences – not from the Chinese, not from anyone else.”

Publicly, Putin and Xi have attempted to show a united front in recent weeks – an indication they believe their partnership can help weather predictable Western constraints on their respective geopolitical ambitions. In practice, however, the U.S. believes China likely considers Russia to be unpredictable and likewise Moscow believes Beijing does not respect its leaders as peer partners, according to current and former officials speaking to U.S. News on the condition of anonymity.

The pair held a high-profile meeting in early February at the outset of the Winter Olympics that Beijing hosted at a time of skyrocketing tensions with the West, though little is known about what they discussed – including the extent to which Putin forewarned Xi about his ambitions in Ukraine.

After their meeting Xi and Putin issued a joint statement that appeared to offer pre-emptive support for Russia’s ambitions toward Ukraine and China’s designs on Taiwan – which it considers a renegade province. However, the relatively uniform international condemnation of Russia’s subsequent aggression in Ukraine has likely created pause among decision-makers in Beijing who likely consider their ambitions to reintegrate Taiwan with mainland China as far from inevitable.

Indeed, Russia’s latest acts of aggression not only strain its relations with China but also endanger Beijing’s own investments. Burns said Thursday that China, like Russia, also does not appear to have anticipated the extent to which European powers and their allies across the Atlantic would unite in their condemnation of Russia and willingness to punish Moscow for its invasion.

“The Chinese leadership looks at Europe not just as a market but as a kind of player with whom they can have an independent relationship and try to look for ways in which they can drive wedges between us and our European allies,” Burns said. “And what President Putin has so successfully done is to make that much less likely.”

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HEADLINE	03/11 Day 16 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/11/russia-ukraine-war-update-what-we-know-on-day-16-of-the-russian-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy said Russia was a “terrorist state” in his latest video address. “The world must know it. The world must acknowledge it,” he said, and also accused Russian forces of attacking a convoy of humanitarian aid for the besieged city of Mariupol.• Russian forces appear to be regrouping in order to encircle Kyiv. In a potentially significant military development, satellite images released by the US company Maxar Technologies on Thursday appeared to show that the large Russian military convoy last seen north-west of Kyiv had largely dispersed and redeployed. Maxar said its pictures showed that armoured units had fanned out through towns and forests in the area, with artillery pieces moved into potential firing positions.• Zelenskiy said no one had been evacuated from Mariupol on Thursday but almost 40,000 people had fled on Thursday from five other cities.• The Russian defence ministry said that it would open up humanitarian corridors on Friday for civilians to evacuate from Kyiv, Kharkiv, Sumy, Chernihiv and Mariupol. It also accused Ukraine of using security service personnel to drive aid trucks and spy on Russian military positions.• US president Joe Biden will announce another ratcheting up of the economic pressure on Friday when he calls for the end of normal trade relations with Russia. This measure will cast Russia into the economic wilderness along with Cuba and North Korea and deepen the recession the IMF says is already beginning to bite.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Union leaders “acknowledged the European aspirations” of Ukraine and agreed to support Ukraine in “pursuing its European path”. After a meeting in Versailles, a statement also called for an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Russian forces, and praised Ukraine’s courageous resistance. • A recently released report from the UK’s Ministry of Defence says Russian forces are “committing an increased number of their deployed forces to encircle key cities” due to strong Ukrainian resistance. • Air sirens were heard in Lviv the early hours of Friday. Explosions were also reported in Lutsk in north-western Ukraine, near the Polish border, as well as in Dnipro, a major stronghold in central-eastern Ukraine. Three air strikes in Dnipro killed at least one person. • The United Nations security council will convene on Friday at Russia’s request, diplomats said, to discuss Moscow’s claims of US biological activities in Ukraine. • High-level talks between Russia and Ukraine – the first of their kind since Moscow invaded its neighbour two weeks ago – ended without a ceasefire. Ukraine’s foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, said there had been no progress towards achieving a ceasefire with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov. • Hundreds of thousands of people in Mariupol face an “increasingly dire and desperate” humanitarian situation, the International Red Cross has said. A delegation leader said people in Mariupol had “started to attack each other for food” and many people report having no food for their children. • The British public will be able to offer accommodation to Ukrainian refugees as the government announces a new route to the UK for those fleeing the Russian invasion. • Boris Johnson has expressed fears that Vladimir Putin may use chemical weapons in Ukraine. Echoing language used by the White House, the UK prime minister said Russian claims about its enemies getting ready to use chemical weapons were “straight out of their playbook”. • Germany’s former chancellor Gerhard Schröder has reportedly met Russian president, Vladimir Putin, in Moscow for talks on ending the war in Ukraine, Politico reported, citing sources familiar with the matter. • The Chelsea football club owner, Roman Abramovich, is among seven of Russia’s wealthiest and most influential oligarchs to have been hit with sanctions by the UK, in an effort to further punish allies of Vladimir Putin over the invasion of Ukraine.
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HEADLINE	03/10 Drone video: Ukraine ambush Russia tanks
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/10/drone-footage-russia-tanks-ambushed-ukraine-forces-kyiv-war
GIST	<p>Drone footage has emerged of a Ukrainian ambush on a Russian armoured column just outside Brovary, an eastern suburb of Kyiv.</p> <p>The specialist open source investigator Bellingcat said it had geolocated the video, to a lightly inhabited area on the E95 road about 22 miles (35km) from the centre of Kyiv, a direct route to the east of the capital where Russian forces have been trying to mass.</p> <p>The edited 45-second video, which was released by Ukraine’s armed forces, is a montage of the fighting on the road and shows a company or more of Russian tanks and armoured vehicles coming under repeated attack. Its production quality means the fighting filmed may not have taken place on Thursday.</p> <p>It is overlaid with an audio of what appears to be a Russian officer reporting an attack to his superiors. This is presented as an effective commentary on the fighting shown. It also said the regiment’s commander was killed, named by Ukrainian media as Col Andrei Zakharov, although this could not be independently confirmed.</p> <p>“Sixth regiment lost,” the officer tells headquarters. “I cannot report about the 6th regiment. I’m collecting data. Lots of losses. They waited for us. Head of the convoy got into the ambush. Regiment commander killed in action.”</p>

Several military experts described the video as credible and said it showed surprising tactics on the part of the Russian forces, with more than 20 tanks and other armoured vehicles on a main road fairly close to the capital.

Ben Barry, a former tank commander with the British army and a land warfare specialist with the International Institute for Strategic Studies, a thinktank, said: “They either think they are going through a safe area, or they were not well trained or they are moving fast for some other requirement.”

Tanks moving through a built-up area should normally use close infantry support to prevent ambushes from the side of the road, Barry said. Having watched the footage, he said he thought the Russian armour was probably targeted with artillery or mortar fire because the nature of the blasts.

On the audio, the Russian apparently reporting the ambush speculates that they may been targeted by Turkish Bayraktar drones, but parts of the video show poor conditions and low cloud cover not considered ideal for drone attacks.

Parts of the footage also show a TOS-1 heavy flamethrower, clearly marked with a painted O symbol, towards the bottom of the screen. At one point during the fighting it unleashes an incendiary rocket at a target apparently off screen, a demonstration of Russian willingness to use thermobaric weapons during combat.

Another expert on the Russian military who reviewed the video, Rob Lee, a former US marine and PhD student at King’s College London, [said he thought this displayed](#) “very poor tactics” on the part of the Russians, with a force clearly positioned “on an obvious avenue of approach”.

Russia has taken heavier than expected losses during the invasion, which began just over two weeks ago. Ukraine has sought to make a public relations play of Ukrainian successes, releasing film of destroyed Russian tanks or enemy armour being towed by tractors.

So far, 164 Russian tanks have been destroyed, damaged or captured, according to the specialist monitor Oryx, which is tracking losses using photo or video evidence. Oryx says for Russian armoured fighting vehicles, the number is 102. Ukraine has lost 47 tanks and 39 fighting vehicles from its smaller force.

An assessment by the US earlier this week suggested [5,000 to 6,000 Russian troops had been killed](#) and 2,000 to 4,000 Ukrainian troops, plus many more civilians. Another US assessment estimated that both sides had lost 8% to 10% of the military assets that they had committed to the fighting.

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Click on source link to view drone footage

HEADLINE	03/10 Covid child deaths: 1/3rd in Omicron surge
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/11/us-child-covid-deaths-omicron-surge
GIST	<p>As many as a third of all child deaths from Covid in the US have occurred during the Omicron surge of the pandemic.</p> <p>Children seem to be facing increasing risks from Covid-19 even as mask mandates drop across the country, and vaccination rates among children stall out at alarmingly low rates.</p> <p>“We saw a massive surge of hospitalized young children during Omicron that we didn’t see in the earlier months of the pandemic,” said Jake Kane, a pediatric intensivist and associate professor of pediatrics at the University of Chicago Comer children’s hospital.</p> <p>Since the beginning of the year, 550 children have died from Covid-19 in the US, compared with 1,017 children in the preceding 22 months, according to data from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).</p>

Omicron was first identified in November, and within weeks became the dominant variant in the US. Although Omicron is less severe than Delta, it is three to five times worse than previous variants, recent CDC [research](#) shows.

The variant may also affect younger children in different ways than previous versions of the virus. Omicron tends to infect the upper airways, which in children are narrower and can be more easily irritated.

“Omicron really did something different than Delta, and I don’t think it was just because more kids were infected,” Kane said. He saw younger patients with illnesses similar to croup and bronchiolitis, which can be dangerous in young children with “a pediatric airway the diameter of a pencil”, he said.

“It’s no longer fair even to insinuate that Covid doesn’t affect children, that Covid deaths are only in unhealthy children or kids with risk factors. That’s just not true, by the data.”

The under-five age group saw [record-high hospitalizations](#) over the past few months. Omicron hospitalization rates for kids under the age of five soared five times higher at Omicron’s peak than during the Delta wave, according to recent CDC [research](#).

Among all ages of children, those under one may face the highest risk of severe disease, yet they are not able to take many of the precautions available to older people. Children under two cannot wear face masks, and children under five are not yet eligible for Covid vaccination.

Nearly 5 million children have been infected with Covid in 2022, and cases are now sharply declining. The majority of children who become infected with Covid have mild cases, but that may change as variants evolve and emerge – Kane called it the “million-dollar question”.

“Omicron has been very bad for kids. We don’t know what future variants will do,” said Julia Raifman, assistant professor at the Boston University School of Public Health, who flagged the sharp uptick in Omicron deaths. “We don’t have a good enough understanding of what protection there is from prior infection, how long it lasts, how robust it is.”

In coming months, she said, “we’ll see a lot more infection, and more cases will always mean more hospitalizations and deaths,” especially with low vaccination rates.

Florida’s surgeon general recently [recommended against](#) vaccinating “healthy” kids given the possibility of side-effects, which remain extremely rare and are outweighed by the vaccines’ protection.

Vaccines are highly effective against severe illness, hospitalization and death for eligible children. But less than 30% of children between the ages of five and 11 are vaccinated in the US, and a little more than half of children 12 to 17 are vaccinated.

Preventive measures like masks should stay in place at schools and daycares, as well as parents’ workplaces and public transportation, in order to protect children as long as the virus is circulating, Raifman said.

“The kids who are too young to wear masks really need other people to reduce transmission around them,” she said.

Requiring face masks in schools during the Delta wave last fall helped reduce Covid cases by 23%, according to CDC [research](#) published on Tuesday.

A nationwide child vaccination campaign is very important as well, Raifman said – especially one in multiple languages that focuses on low-income communities where not enough families have gotten vaccinated.

	<p>Covid has hit marginalized communities harder – and vaccination rates and access to medical care tend to be lower in the same communities, creating a double whammy, Kane said.</p> <p>Vaccines provide some protection against infection, which helps keep the virus from spreading, and they also offer excellent protection against hospitalization and death.</p> <p>Vaccinating and boosting those who are eligible would help protect children too young to be eligible themselves, as well as providing other important benefits, Raifman said.</p> <p>“We’ve never achieved high-enough vaccinations in the United States – we lag far behind other countries – and it makes us really vulnerable to continued high rates of death, hospitalization, societal disruption, economic disruption.”</p> <p>And deaths are only one measure of Covid’s effects, she said. “Long Covid is also a concern for kids; the record-high hospitalizations are concerning for kids.”</p> <p>Amid the fear and exhaustion of the Omicron surge, Kane’s overwhelming feeling was frustration, because proven measures are available to keep many children from becoming severely ill or dying.</p> <p>“Kids shouldn’t die,” he said. “Kids shouldn’t die.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Gas prices hit ride share drivers hard
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/10/gig-workers-gas-prices-california-uber-lyft
GIST	<p>By Tuesday afternoon, Lyft driver Elida Zabaleta had earned \$100 in the five hours she spent ferrying passengers across the city of San Jose. With gas prices in California surging, she’d have to use more than half of that to cover fuel for the day, leaving her with just \$45.</p> <p>The rising cost of gas has made a difficult job all the more difficult, Zabaleta said, forcing her to spend more time behind the wheel to earn enough to afford living in one of the country’s most expensive cities.</p> <p>US gas prices have reached record highs in recent weeks, surging in part by the fallout of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine after already having been high for months. California drivers are paying the most of any in the country, at an average of \$5.57 a gallon, according to AAA.</p> <p>Rising prices are hitting gig workers particularly hard as fuel makes up a large part of their daily costs. Uber and Lyft drivers already struggling after the pandemic hit both wages and working conditions say paying more at the pump means they have to spend more time driving in order to achieve the same level of pay. Some are spending more than 60 hours a week working, and some say driving is simply no longer profitable.</p> <p>Zabaleta, who has driven for Lyft for two years and also works as an organizer with Gig Workers Rising, paid \$5.20 a gallon to fill up this week. Meanwhile, factoring in the cost of gas, her income came out to about \$9 an hour, far below San Jose’s \$16.20 minimum wage. Zabaleta routinely spends as many as 50 hours a week behind the wheel, giving herself just one day off, and is working more to cover the increasing costs.</p> <p>Even before gas prices started rising, pay was becoming increasingly unpredictable driving for Lyft, she said. She previously drove five days a week, but with fewer passengers during the pandemic and fewer bonuses from Lyft, Zabaleta had to add an extra work day to her week in order to maintain the same level of income, she said. Companies such as Lyft aren’t doing enough to help drivers, she said.</p> <p>“This job should be something the worker should enjoy doing – this is a job that’s high risk and we’re putting our lives on the line everyday,” she said.</p>

Other drivers said that without increased wages or other support from ride share companies to help alleviate the burden of fuel costs, driving will no longer be worthwhile.

Rondu Gantt started working as a ride share driver in the San Francisco Bay area in 2018 to supplement his income, but began driving full-time after his teaching job left him burnt out. Since then wages have only dropped, he said, and without the bonuses the companies offer, the job wouldn't be profitable at all.

"We are at the point where we need the companies to pay bonuses every week just to make the job sustainable," said Gantt, who is also an organizer with Gig Workers Rising. The normal pay rate is too low, he said, so in addition to driving during the day, he routinely returns to the road at night when surge pricing is in effect.

The high price of gas has made the job more challenging, Gantt said. "My costs are higher, my pay is the same, so I'm losing money. That's a mathematical reality," he said.

Benjamin Valdez, who drives part-time for Uber and Lyft in Los Angeles and works as an organizer with Rideshare Drivers United, said he hasn't driven for two weeks because of the high gas prices. When fuel costs go up, drivers stay out on the road for longer in order to try to make a profit, he said, which means there is more competition for rides.

The loss in income is difficult for his family, Valdez said, but with gas prices as high as they are and more drivers out on the road, he'd be losing money driving. "I only drive when it's profitable, which is few and far between right now," he said.

California's governor, Gavin Newsom, has said he will propose a tax rebate to help the state's drivers grapple with the increasing costs at the pump. Drivers are also hoping to see companies such as Lyft and Uber take steps to help support them amid the high prices, which experts say will likely continue for months.

Organizers with Rideshare Drivers United are petitioning the rideshare companies to raise compensation and "set the rates fairly and equitably because of our increased costs", said Daniel Russell, a part-time Uber driver and organizer with RDU.

When asked if Lyft would offer additional support to drivers as fuel costs increase, Lyft spokesperson CJ Macklin said it had taken concrete steps to help, including a fuel cash-back program run in partnership with GetUpside. Macklin also said that US drivers were now seeing greater average hourly pay than they were a year ago, even with high fuel prices, as more riders return to the platform. Uber did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Vitalii Konstantinov, who drives for Uber in San Diego and works with Rideshare Drivers United, said rising costs have forced him to dip into his family's budget, and cancel a trip to Disneyland he had planned for his young children. He's actively looking for other jobs.

"It's not worth driving for Uber any more," he said.

Gantt said he was also considering leaving the industry.

"It is unsustainable for me to feel comfortable in this industry right now. I feel the vulnerability. I see how reliant I am on them to give me a bonus, I see how low the rate is," he said. "I can't work 16 hours every day. I'm gonna burn out. It's physically demanding to be tired, drinking coffee, under-rested, and driving morning and night."

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HEADLINE	03/10 MLB owners, players agree to new contract
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/mlb-owners-players-labor-deal-11646944073?mod=hp_lead_pos5

Major League Baseball team owners and the players' union agreed to a new labor contract Thursday, ending a lockout that lasted more than three months in time to restore a full season in 2022.

Opening day is now set for April 7, one week later than initially planned.

The other games will be made up by extending the regular season by a few days and with scheduled nine-inning doubleheaders, rather than the seven-inning variety used in 2020 and 2021 as part of MLB's pandemic protocols. Spring training camps will open across Florida and Arizona this weekend, with exhibitions starting late next week.

Commissioner Rob Manfred [had previously said](#) that missing games because of a work stoppage would be a "disastrous outcome," akin to the strike of 1994 that wiped away the World Series. On Thursday, he acknowledged what had long been evident: Baseball's labor relations have deteriorated on his watch—and it is his job to fix that.

"One of the things that I'm supposed to do is promote a good relationship with our players," Manfred said. "I've tried to do that. I have not been successful in that."

Manfred had already canceled the first four series of the year but left open the possibility of reinstating them if the parties completed a new collective bargaining agreement quickly. The ticking clock inspired a marathon session of negotiating in New York this week that saw the parties slowly inch closer to a compromise.

The road there was filled with detours, speed bumps and moments in which the discussions appeared to be on the verge of collapse. But it eventually culminated in a deal, averting a crisis that could've had long-lasting consequences for the sport.

"Our union endured the second-longest work stoppage in its history to achieve significant progress in key areas that will improve not just current players' rights and benefits, but those of generations to come," union executive director Tony Clark said. "Players remained engaged and unified from beginning to end, and in the process reenergized our fraternity."

The players accomplished many of their primary goals, including increased compensation for its youngest members and a less stringent "luxury tax" on team payrolls that enables owners to spend more freely without penalty. The union rank-and-file pushed the deal through against the recommendation of the eight-player executive subcommittee, which didn't support it.

Owners achieved the expanded postseason field they coveted and maintained the basic framework of the sport's economic system, particularly the pathways to free agency and salary arbitration, which they deemed an essential component of any accord.

"I hope that the players appreciate that we worked very hard to address the key concerns that they brought to the table," Manfred said.

Now comes a frenzied sprint to the season, with some 200 free agents scrambling to find jobs in a short window. Some of the available players are among the game's best, like Kris Bryant, Carlos Correa, Freddie Freeman and Trevor Story.

Baseball will look a little different moving forward. The designated hitter will be used in the National League on a permanent basis following its trial run during the pandemic-shortened campaign in 2020, meaning the era of pitchers at the plate is over (with the exception of two-way sensation Shohei Ohtani of the Los Angeles Angels).

The postseason will include 12 participants rather than 10, meaning more players like Mike Trout—Ohtani's superstar teammate who hasn't seen the playoffs since 2014—might finally get to experience playing in October.

More dramatic changes could come as soon as 2023, when MLB has gained the right to effectively implement rule changes in the offseason with 45 days of notice. Additions to be considered include: a pitch clock to speed up the pace of games; a ban on defensive shifts in an effort to inspire more contact; the addition of bigger bases, which is mostly geared toward injury-prevention but could also lead to more steals; and an automated strike zone.

“Looking forward, I could not be more excited about the future of our game,” Manfred said. “We have an opportunity in front of us. It’s an opportunity that we need to work with the players to fully seize.

But the labor dispute ultimately had little to do with anything that happens on the field. Instead, owners shut down the industry over the economic backbone underpinning the sport’s foundation, a system the players were looking to shake up after the average salary decreased over the life of the last CBA.

The union was seeking increased compensation for its youngest members, achieving that goal in two ways. The minimum salary will climb from \$570,500 in 2021 to \$700,000 in 2022 with annual \$20,000 raises. The parties will also create a performance-based bonus pool of \$50 million that will be disbursed to top contributors who don’t yet qualify for salary arbitration.

The thorniest issue of all revolved around the luxury tax, which levies escalating penalties on teams for spending over certain payroll limits. The players believe that clubs had started to use the tax—a mechanism designed to curb runaway spending—as a de facto salary cap acting as an artificial constraint on salaries. MLB officials argue that the tax is necessary to ensure that small-market teams can compete with the likes of the New York Yankees and Los Angeles Dodgers in a sport without a salary cap.

In a negotiation that was contentious from the outset, the clash over the future of the luxury tax was particularly hostile, emerging as a potential dealbreaker. Players wanted significantly higher thresholds before the tax kicked in. Management pushed hard to add extra severe surcharges for the highest-spending clubs—an attempt to suppress people like Steve Cohen of the New York Mets, baseball’s richest owner who has shown a willingness to spare no expense to build his roster.

After ferocious debate, the sides agreed for the tax to be triggered at payrolls of \$230 million, up from \$210 million in 2021, and steadily climbing to \$244 million in 2026.

Other additions include the implementation of a lottery for the first six draft picks, which could help curb the practice of “tanking,” a popular rebuilding strategy where teams intentionally gut their roster to cut costs and accumulate talent for the future. The players were looking for ways to incentivize competition among teams, which would in turn cause a more robust market for free agents.

Also, multiple safeguards were put in place against service-time manipulation, where teams keep top prospects in the minors longer than necessary to delay their free agency. Now, anybody who finishes first or second in Rookie of the Year voting will receive a full year of service regardless of when they are promoted. Teams can also receive extra draft picks for carrying top prospects on their opening-day rosters.

The owners had a considerably shorter list of objectives, highlighted by the expanded playoffs, which will bring in tens of millions of dollars in additional annual revenues. They had pushed for a 14-game format but eventually consented to 12. Management also successfully bargained for the right to add advertisements to uniforms, similar to the NBA.

Most of all, management was looking to stave off more dramatic alterations to baseball’s economic system. The players began the discussions by asking for an age-based path to free agency in addition to six years of service time, the current requirement, and increased eligibility for salary arbitration, which management considered to be nonstarters. In those areas, the owners prevailed.

Manfred initially canceled the first two series of the season last week after nine days of negotiation in Florida broke down without an agreement. Talks heated up again this week, but as recently as Wednesday

night, the chances of a deal appeared to be in peril. The sides feuded over MLB's desire to implement a draft of international amateurs, and Manfred wiped away another week of games.

They solved that issue Thursday, and management presented another counterproposal with a 3 p.m. ET deadline attached. The union's eight-man executive subcommittee and 30 player representatives then went to a vote. The result was 26-12 in favor of the offer, largely divided between union leadership and the rank-and-file.

The player reps, one from each club, voted "yes" by a tally of 26-4, after consulting with their teammates. All eight members of the executive subcommittee—five of whom are represented by powerful agent Scott Boras and include stars like Max Scherzer and Gerrit Cole—voted no.

For Manfred, the stakes in this negotiation were high. He oversaw an abbreviated season in 2020, when MLB and the union clashed over the economics of staging games without fans in attendance because of the pandemic.

A second shortened season caused by labor unrest would've been devastating for Manfred's legacy. He sees himself as an experienced, dealmaking labor lawyer who previously helped deliver four CBAs without a work stoppage. The lockout put that reputation at risk—a potentially crushing blow for an embattled commissioner still reeling from the fallout of the Houston Astros' sign-stealing scandal, among other controversies during his tenure.

After the players ratified the deal, Manfred reached out to Clark to express his desire to work better together moving forward.

"I hope the players will see the effort we made to address their concerns in this agreement as an olive branch in terms of building a better relationship," Manfred said.

Whether baseball will suffer any long-term consequences from what was an ugly chapter in the game's history remains unclear. The process of ending the second-longest work stoppage in baseball history was long and frustrating, largely unfolding in real time on social media.

The sides bargained halfheartedly before the old CBA expired on Dec. 1, at which point the owners initiated a lockout, a move that wasn't required. They did it, they said, to force a quicker negotiation but then waited six weeks to offer the union their first proposal. From there, talks transpired at a plodding pace, inspiring little confidence that a full season would be possible.

But in collective bargaining, deadlines have a way of inspiring movement. And with the season in peril, after months of rhetoric and posturing, the owners and the union made a deal, ensuring five years of labor peace in baseball.

"I do believe that the lockout helped move the process along," Manfred said, adding, "We made an agreement when it was possible to make an agreement."

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HEADLINE	03/11 China stocks plunge; SEC stokes concerns
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinese-stocks-plunge-after-sec-stokes-delisting-concerns-11646984220?mod=hp_lista_pos1
GIST	<p>A further step by the Securities and Exchange Commission toward forcing companies from China off American exchanges helped trigger the worst decline in U.S.-listed Chinese stocks since the global financial crisis, and sparked a second selloff in Hong Kong.</p> <p>The steep drops add to a punishing period for Chinese shares—some of which have now lost 40% or more in value over the last six months. They have already been buffeted by a series of regulatory crackdowns</p>

from Beijing, and have been caught up in the broader market unease sparked by elevated inflation, [the war in Ukraine](#) and the prospect of rising U.S. interest rates.

The Nasdaq Golden Dragon China Index of China-focused U.S.-listed companies closed 10% lower Thursday. That took the index, which includes many American depositary receipts, to its lowest since 2016, and marked its biggest one-day percentage decline since October 2008, Refinitiv data showed.

Many stocks registered double-digit drops, with the e-commerce groups JD.com Inc. and Pinduoduo Inc. falling 16% and 17%, respectively.

In Hong Kong trading Friday, shares fell steeply before recouping some of their losses. The city's Hang Seng Index ended 1.6% lower, while the Hang Seng Tech Index retreated 4.3%.

On Thursday, the SEC provisionally named five companies, including the biotechnology group BeiGene Ltd. and Yum China Holdings Inc., the operator of KFC in China, as firms whose audit working papers couldn't be inspected by U.S. regulators.

A 2020 law, the Holding Foreign Companies Accountable Act, would ban trading in securities of companies whose audit papers can't be checked for three years in a row. Strategists at Morgan Stanley said they expected the SEC to add more names to the provisional list in the coming weeks, as those companies released their annual reports.

"We're definitely in some complete dislocation when it comes to sentiment and China," said Andy Maynard, head of equities at China Renaissance. "This is just another nail in the coffin for investors when it comes to China and especially ADRs."

The market value of the MSCI China Index has fallen by some \$1.45 trillion from a peak in February of last year, when it was worth some \$3.6 trillion, Refinitiv data shows.

JD.com on Thursday had reported a better-than-expected quarterly adjusted profit and solid guidance for this year, Sanford C. Bernstein analysts said in a note to clients. "None of that mattered," given the SEC news, they wrote.

China's securities regulator said it continued to engage with the U.S. Public Company Accounting Oversight Board, the federal audit watchdog overseen by the SEC. In a statement Friday, it said it respected foreign regulators overseeing accounting firms, but opposed the politicization of securities regulation.

Yum China said as things stood, it would be delisted from the New York Stock Exchange in early 2024, unless it was excluded from the law or its auditor could be fully inspected. "The company will continue to monitor market developments and evaluate all strategic options," it said.

Yum China and many other companies have already secured second listings in Hong Kong, meaning their shares could continue to trade if they were ejected from U.S. markets. Some of the steepest drops Thursday were among companies that haven't obtained such a listing, including Pinduoduo and the property-portal operator KE Holdings Inc., which fell 24%.

Another of the named companies, Zai Lab Ltd., said it was working toward hiring an accountancy firm whose work could be inspected by U.S. regulators. "The company's provisional identification does not mean that the company is about to be delisted by the SEC from Nasdaq," it said.

Bankers and lawyers say Chinese companies are now looking more actively at listing by introduction in Hong Kong—a way of going public that doesn't require a company to raise capital or sell new shares.

	Onshore Chinese shares have been comparatively shielded from the regulatory pressure that has pummeled their offshore equivalents. The CSI 300 index rose 0.3%, rebounding from some losses from earlier in the day.
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HEADLINE	03/10 Russia fresh assault on Mariupol
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-ramps-up-attacks-after-deadly-hit-on-maternity-hospital-11646907696?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos2
GIST	<p>Moscow launched a fresh assault on the besieged southern Ukrainian city of Mariupol on Thursday, a day after one of its planes bombed a maternity hospital, illustrating how Russia is ramping up a violent push to take strategic towns, at a high cost for civilians.</p> <p>Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, after a meeting with his Ukrainian counterpart on Thursday, said the hospital was a legitimate target because it was held by “local radical militias,” though Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters “we don’t have clear information” about the incident.</p> <p>“It’s a total lie,” Mariupol Mayor Vadym Boychenko said in response to Mr. Lavrov’s assertion. “Everything that was said, each word, was absolutely not true.”</p> <p>Mr. Lavrov’s meeting with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba in Antalya, Turkey, was the highest-level contact between the two countries since the start of the war, but the diplomats failed to reach a cease-fire agreement or any deal to protect civilians caught up in hostilities.</p> <p>Ukrainian authorities raised the casualty count of Wednesday’s hospital bombing in Mariupol to three dead and 17 wounded. U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris, during a visit to Poland on Thursday, called for a war crimes investigation, adding that Russia was committing atrocities in Ukraine.</p> <p>Russia has been accused before of targeting hospitals. Physicians for Human Rights corroborated 492 attacks on healthcare facilities in Syria and 847 deaths of medical personnel there between March 2011 and December 2017 that were caused by Russian and Syrian forces. Other groups, including Doctors Without Borders, had similar findings. Russia at one point called such accusations “figments of the imagination.”</p> <p>The daily bombardment of Mariupol has left the city of more than 400,000 without food, clean water or electricity. Video footage of parts of Mariupol has begun to resemble cities flattened by Russia in other conflicts, such as Grozny in Chechnya and Idlib in Syria. Mr. Boychenko said this week that children in the city have started to die from dehydration.</p> <p>Shelling on Thursday killed 36 civilians and wounded many others in the city, a spokesman for a local defense regiment said. The Mariupol mayor’s office said more than 1,200 civilians have been killed since the beginning of the siege.</p> <p>For the Kremlin, Mariupol is a key objective. Capturing the strategically important port city would open a land corridor from the Russian border along Ukraine’s southern coast to Crimea, which Moscow annexed in 2014, and free up Russian forces to move on Kyiv. Russia began bombarding the city on the first day of its invasion, and its ground forces have attacked from the east and west.</p> <p>The large Russian military convoy that was last seen northwest of Kyiv has largely dispersed and redeployed, Maxar Technologies, which has been tracking the convoy with satellite images, said Thursday.</p> <p>Ukraine’s government resumed efforts to evacuate civilians Thursday from a handful of cities where Ukrainian and Russian forces have agreed to a tentative cease-fire. While similar efforts have failed because of fighting, the Ukrainian government said 60,000 civilians have escaped through agreed-upon corridors since the first were organized earlier this week.</p>

Attempts to evacuate people from Mariupol on the Azov Sea have failed repeatedly. Its siege and bombardment is becoming a cautionary tale for what might happen to other Ukrainian cities as Russia presses its invasion.

The city is now surrounded by Russian troops, some of whom have reached its outskirts, according to local authorities. The Ukrainian defenses have taken severe losses but have been able to repel the attacks, Mariupol's Deputy Mayor Serhiy Orlov said.

The city is guarded by a force consisting of Ukraine's coast and border guard as well as a local militia that was formed by volunteers in response to Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine.

The militia began as a ragtag unit that was later formally admitted into the regular armed forces of Ukraine as part of the National Guard. It has since become one of the best-equipped and best-trained military units, hardened over eight years of warfare in the area that joins Ukraine-controlled territory from the Russian-occupied zone.

Oleg Zhdanov, a reserve colonel in the Ukrainian army and a military analyst, said Mariupol's defenders include units with ample experience fighting Russian-led troops in Ukraine's east. He said they have inflicted heavy losses in the past two weeks on Russian attackers, who he said had been mounting costly frontal assaults.

But the siege has left the remaining residents hunkering down in basements to try to escape the shelling and struggling to find food and water.

Andzela Timchenko, a grandmother of four small children, said by telephone Thursday that she and her family have been taking refuge in a basement of their home, melting snow for drinking water. But she said even the snow had run out, and she worried that her grandchildren may soon suffer from dehydration. She said local authorities provided small rations of Pepsi-Cola and cereals on Wednesday, as well as pellets to make fire to warm up and cook meals.

Her family had been awakened by the roar of warplanes at 3 a.m. Thursday, followed by a barrage of explosions that caused the earth to shake beneath them, she said.

"They are bombing everything, the streets are full of dead people," she said.

Father Serhi Gorobtsov, an orthodox priest, said the air raid Thursday was more intense than others before it. "Tall buildings are collapsing like dominoes," Father Gorobtsov posted on his Facebook page.

At the bombed hospital site, Mr. Orlov, Mariupol's deputy mayor, said uncounted bodies couldn't be recovered because of intense shelling, and that 47 were buried in a common grave on Wednesday. The hospital was the second to be hit after a major clinic with 600 beds was targeted earlier in the week. A blood bank was also bombed, Mr. Orlov said.

Mr. Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, blamed biased Western media for reporting the alleged atrocities and shrugged off worries about Western economic sanctions that have begun to sever Russia's ties with the U.S. and Europe.

Russia, he said, would retool its economy to be more independent, a move that was "long overdue."

In the U.S., the Senate Thursday night passed a massive spending bill that [provides \\$13.6 billion in aid for Ukraine](#), including more than \$3 billion for European Command operations mission support, the deployment of personnel to the region and intelligence support.

U.S. officials say that Moscow, having failed to swiftly [take control of Ukraine](#) after it launched its invasion two weeks ago, is likely to try advancing with increasing disregard for civilian casualties.

	<p>Moscow has said its forces aren't deliberately targeting civilians.</p> <p>Western analysts say that rising civilian casualties are inevitable as the fighting in Ukraine moves into major cities. Ukrainian forces, unable to match the Russians in manpower or weaponry, have shown a preference to falling back to urban areas, where fierce fighting is anticipated.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Russia war fans flames of global inflation
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/war-in-ukraine-fans-the-flames-of-global-inflation-11646922368?mod=hp_major_pos2#cxrecs_s
GIST	<p>From the Russian Revolution to Vietnam, war has been a reliable precursor to inflation. History may be about to repeat as Russia's invasion of Ukraine tilts the balance of global political and economic forces toward higher inflation.</p> <p>War fuels higher prices for three reasons. First, military needs on top of civilian demand strains the economy's productive capacity, especially when that capacity has been damaged by bombs.</p> <p>Second, embargoes, sanctions and fighting disrupt supply chains. These factors are clearly at work now: sanctions have disrupted already frayed supply chains, and military spending is on the rise.</p> <p>Third, governments often finance war by printing money or keeping interest rates too low. So whether the immediate burst of inflation precipitated by Russia's attack persists depends crucially on whether the Federal Reserve and other central banks have the means and inclination to push inflation back down.</p> <p>Before the 1930s, currencies were often convertible to gold which kept the supply of money and thus inflation in check. During war, convertibility was routinely suspended and sometimes abandoned altogether. Hyperinflation (when prices rise at least 50% in one month, according to one rule of thumb) in the last century often came during or in the aftermath of war: in Germany after its defeat in the World War I, in the Soviet Union following the Bolshevik takeover in 1917, and in China when the Nationalists fought the Japanese and then Communists in the 1930s and 1940s.</p> <p>The U.S. has had plenty of experience with wartime inflation. During World War I, an inflow of gold from Europe boosted the U.S. money supply and the Fed kept interest rates low to help finance the war effort. As a result, prices soared and after the war the Fed engineered a severe recession to stabilize them. By World War II, the U.S. had effectively left the gold standard. To cap inflation and aid mobilization, the federal government imposed price controls and the Fed capped interest rates. Shortly after controls were lifted in 1946, prices shot up.</p> <p>In the 1960s, spending on both the Vietnam War and President Lyndon Johnson's antipoverty programs helped overheat the economy. By October 1973, inflation had already topped 7% when Arab countries embargoed oil exports to the U.S. in retaliation for supporting Israel in the Yom Kippur War, sending inflation by November 1974 above 12%.</p> <p>Wars have generally been less prevalent and more localized since the end of the Cold War and thus less economically damaging. The U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, while costly, occurred as globalization and new technology were putting downward pressure on costs world-wide.</p> <p>Globalization is now unraveling; Russia's invasion of Ukraine may have delivered the fatal blow.</p> <p>Russia is feeling the effects most acutely. With its currency down by about half and imports crippled by sanctions, Russia's inflation is headed to between 20% and 25%, said Sergey Aleksashenko, a former Russian central bank official. In 2020 Russia spent 4.3% of GDP on defense, one of the world's highest ratios, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. But because of hidden and classified expenditure, "We really do not know how much Russia has been spending on its military," Elina</p>

Ribakova, deputy chief economist at the Institute of International Finance, said in an email. “It could be double the amount we know publicly and could last a while (even allowing for corruption).”

The West won’t be spared either. The war in Ukraine has aggravated a shortage of natural gas that has already sent inflation up sharply in the Europe Union. The bloc is now contemplating a sweeping and costly [restructuring of its entire energy system](#) to exclude Russian natural gas altogether. Higher military spending could also add to inflationary pressure. Germany [plans to raise military spending](#) to 2% of GDP from 2021’s 1.5%.

Naz Masraff of Eurasia Group said that will require a constitutional amendment to loosen Germany’s “debt brake,” which constrains deficits. That German Finance Minister Christian Lindner, leader of the fiscally conservative Free Democratic Party, is spearheading the spending boost underlines how much war has reordered German fiscal orthodoxy.

The U.S. should be buffeted less by the economic spillovers of war: it depends less on Russian natural gas, is a net oil exporter, and already spends a relatively hefty 3.3% of GDP on defense. But Russia’s invasion of Ukraine makes a “structural increase in deficit-financed spending more likely in the long term,” Jon Lieber of Eurasia Group wrote in a note to clients. He notes Congress’ proposed omnibus spending deal would raise military spending by 5.6% and nondefense spending by 6.7%, “even though Republicans had plenty of leverage to insist on flat funding for both.”

That defense increase merely matches inflation. Kentucky’s Mitch McConnell, Republican minority leader in the Senate, has called for 5% more in military spending above inflation to “meet the growing threats posed by Russia and China.”

True, the added military spending and higher oil prices pale in comparison to the 1960s and 1970s. Still, like then, they come at a time when inflation already has plenty of momentum from strong demand, tight labor markets and disrupted supply chains. Back then, the Fed failed to respond decisively, in part because of political pressure not to undermine the war effort. After one rate increase, an angry Lyndon Johnson shoved then Fed-chairman William McChesney Martin around a room yelling, “Boys are dying in Vietnam, and Bill Martin doesn’t care!” It’s a part of history the Fed should not want to repeat.

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HEADLINE	03/11 Russia military grinds forward: heavy cost
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/03/11/russia-military-ukraine-battlefield-progress/
GIST	<p>They don’t fully control the skies, despite possessing one of the world’s most advanced air forces. Their ground assault on the capital has been inching along for days, with a miles-long convoy marooned by supply problems. And all the while, they are taking heavy losses — both in personnel and equipment.</p> <p>Two weeks after Russian forces streamed into neighboring Ukraine following months of buildup, evidence is mounting that the invasion has not gone to plan — and that Russia’s much-vaunted military may not be the formidable force once feared.</p> <p>“The word I’m hearing from everybody in the government who is watching this is ‘surprising.’ My own word is ‘shocking,’” said Barry Pavel, a former top Pentagon official who is now senior vice president at the Atlantic Council. “It’s shocking how incompetent they are in the basics of joint military operations by an advanced country.”</p> <p>That doesn’t mean Russia won’t ultimately seize Kyiv and topple the Ukrainian government. And it doesn’t mean Ukraine won’t pay a horrific price in both military and civilian casualties, as it continues to do daily.</p> <p>But the stumbling pace of Russia’s assault since President Vladimir Putin ordered troops into Ukraine late last month — marked by apparent confusion among commanders plus viral images of downed Russian planes and tanks set alight — has reset expectations for how the conflict will unfold.</p>

And it probably has raised the ultimate cost — to both Ukraine and Russia — of any eventual Russian victory, especially as Moscow appears to have abandoned plans for a lightning advance, relying instead [on shelling besieged cities](#) and launching unguided bombs from the sky.

“What’s the number of civilians killed by days and days and days of artillery? What’s the number that leads to a more favorable Russian position?” Pavel asked. “I’m really worried about that.”

While the invasion has turned into a bloody slog in the face of a fierce Ukrainian resistance, Russian forces have continued to make slow advances around multiple cities — particularly in the south, where several major cities appear in danger of falling in the coming days. Only one major city, Kherson, has so far been taken by the Russians.

In the north, progress has been tougher to discern.

On Thursday, a long-stalled column of Russian military vehicles north of Kyiv moved a bit closer to the capital city, said a senior U.S. defense official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue. Leading elements of that advance are now about nine miles from the center of Kyiv, down from about 12 miles for the prior several days, the Pentagon assesses.

The official described the movement of the column as “creeping” and said it is “very difficult” to predict how long it could take for Russian forces to make a more serious movement. Another advance on Kyiv from the east is just under 20 miles from the city center.

As of Thursday, the Russians had launched 775 missiles at Ukraine since the invasion began, the senior defense official said. The number continues to climb by a few dozen per day.

But Britain’s Defense Ministry said Thursday that there had been a “notable decrease” in Russian air activity over Ukraine in recent days. In an intelligence briefing, officials said the slowdown probably was due to the “unexpected effectiveness and endurance of Ukrainian air defense forces.”

Officials added that the large Russian column north of Kyiv had “made little progress in over a week and is suffering continued losses.”

British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace told Parliament on Wednesday that Russia had nearly twice the number of battalion tactical groups at its disposal than did Ukraine when the war began, and that air superiority tilted the balance even further toward an “overwhelming” Russian advantage. But Wallace said nearly all of Moscow’s objectives in Ukraine have remained unfulfilled.

“President Putin’s arrogant assumption that he would be welcomed as a liberator has deservedly crumbled as fast as his troops’ morale,” Wallace said.

Ukrainian officials have [held a series of news conferences](#) in recent days in which captured Russian soldiers have said they regretted their parts in the war and did not know they would be invading Ukraine until a day before the attack began.

Assessing the exact number of Russian losses in combat has been complicated by the fog of war and the difficulty of interpreting a steady string of photos and videos flashing across social media that depict weapons and vehicles that were seized by Ukrainian forces, destroyed or abandoned.

The Ukrainian military [posted on Facebook](#) on Wednesday that since the invasion began, the Russians had lost 12,000 people, 526 vehicles, 335 tanks, 123 artillery systems and 81 helicopters. If those numbers are accurate, the Russians have lost nearly 7 percent of the 190,000 troops they had arrayed at Ukraine’s border before the invasion began.

It was not immediately clear whether the losses of soldiers include both dead and wounded troops, as well as those taken as prisoners of war.

On Tuesday, senior U.S. intelligence officials said they assessed that 2,000 to 4,000 Russian soldiers have been killed, while adding the caveat that they have “low confidence” in those numbers based on the limited information they have.

Even the lower American estimate would mark an extraordinary loss of life for the Russian military, which was expected to overwhelm Ukrainian forces. During the entire 20-year U.S. war in Afghanistan, 2,461 U.S. troops died. About an additional 4,500 U.S. troops were killed in the U.S. war in Iraq from March 2003 to December 2011, according to Defense Department statistics.

Michael Kofman, director of Russia studies at CNA, a think tank outside Washington, said the U.S. figure probably is closer to the truth than the Ukrainian one, which he said appears to be exaggerated. Still, he said, that scale of loss is significant — especially when coupled with the loss of hundreds of vehicles, including about 160 tanks, according to open-source reporting he has reviewed.

“Probably we’re going to start looking at exhaustion of their force in the next several weeks,” Kofman said. “They’re probably going to reorganize and replenish.”

Replenishing is something Russia can still do. After an erratic showing by the Russian military during a brief war in the republic of Georgia in 2008, Putin went on a spending binge. Moscow has spent about \$154 billion annually on defense in recent years, according to Russian state media, though analysts caution that both corruption and a lack of transparency in the Kremlin make it difficult to assess that figure.

“Yeah, they’ve lost a lot of equipment. But they have a tremendous amount of equipment to begin with, and many of the things they’ve lost are actually pretty replaceable,” Kofman said, noting that Russia still possesses the majority of its best jets, all of its submarines and a variety of other weapons.

The senior U.S. defense official said Thursday that Russia has “greater than 90 percent of their available combat power” still available for use in Ukraine. The official added that the Pentagon has seen no signs of the Russians sending reinforcements.

The past two weeks have shown that just because Russia has the tools of war, that does not mean commanders know how to effectively use them.

François Heisbourg, a French political analyst who used to advise President Emmanuel Macron on national security, said the Russian advances have been strikingly limited.

“They’ve only taken one regional capital out of the 26 which were free of Russian influence before Feb. 25,” Heisbourg said.

And with a fight looming against dug-in Ukrainian troops in each of the cities that remain, it is unclear whether Russia has the capacity — or the will — to succeed.

“The logistics are pathetic. The soldiers are definitely not motivated,” he said. “It’s not what you would call a steady advance. There is actually very little terrain occupied.”

Dominique Trinquand, a retired French general and former head of the French military mission to the United Nations, said the Russians are primarily gaining ground in the south of Ukraine, where there appear to be fewer Ukrainian troops.

The Russians have a strong footprint in that part of the country, including an accumulation of tanks, artillery and protected infantry. “And they are attacking from two sides, from Crimea and from Donbas,” Trinquand said.

He said he expects the Ukrainian city of Mariupol to fall to the Russians within the next four or five days. Other Ukrainian cities in the south, including Odessa, are also at risk of Russian advances. “In Odessa, they will be able to attack from the sea, from the land and from the air,” he said.

Trinquand said Kyiv — where a large-scale evacuation of civilians is underway — will be far trickier. He does not expect Kyiv to be bombed in the same way as Syria’s Aleppo was destroyed. It is more likely, he said, that Russia will use the military pressure it’s already putting on the capital as a bargaining chip in negotiations with Ukraine, “meaning: ‘We’ve captured the south, we are putting pressure on the capital, and now let’s talk,’” he said.

After a call between Macron and Putin last week, a senior French official said his country’s assessment is that Putin wants to take control of the entire country.

But Trinquand said he is not sure that is the Russians’ aim.

“They’ve got roughly 200,000 troops now, to occupy a country which is as large as France,” he said. “They don’t have the forces.”

Nor, apparently, do they have the dominance in the skies that had been widely forecast.

Malcolm Chalmers, deputy director general of RUSI, a London-based think tank, said he’s been surprised at the “very poor performance” of the Russian air force, which has yet to knock out all Ukrainian air assets and defenses — something he had thought would take a matter of days.

The Russian air force, although old, consists of several hundred high-end fixed-wing aircraft that are roughly equivalent to their Western counterparts. But the Russians, he said, “don’t seem to be able to coordinate the use of them together, and deconflict them and ensure they aren’t shooting each other.”

Still, he cautioned against underplaying Russia’s strength. It may not have taken the skies or advanced quickly on the ground, but Russia does have the firepower to do immense damage to Ukraine.

“Having painted the Russians as 10 feet tall compared with Ukrainians, now some people are painting them two feet tall,” Chalmers said. “It’s somewhere in between. They are still a formidable adversary.”

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HEADLINE	03/10 Russia batters, encircles Ukraine cities
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/10/world/europe/russia-bombards-ukrainian-cities.html
GIST	<p>The top diplomats of Russia and Ukraine failed to make even a hint of progress Thursday in their first face-to-face meeting since the Russian invasion began, while Russian bombardments spread more carnage in a two-week-old war that Ukraine estimated had already inflicted \$100 billion in damage.</p> <p>The Russian side, which has refused to call the conflict a war, insisted that it would not end until Ukraine was “demilitarized,” dousing flickers of hope that the meeting in Turkey of Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba of Ukraine and his Russian counterpart, Sergey V. Lavrov, might lead to even a brief cease-fire. Mr. Lavrov later told reporters that was not even discussed.</p> <p>“The broad narrative he conveyed to me,” Mr. Kuleba said afterward, “is that they will continue their aggression until Ukraine meets their demands, and the least of these demands is surrender.”</p> <p>Across swaths of Ukraine, the fighting continued and suffering deepened, especially in besieged and bombarded cities like Mariupol in the southeast and Chernihiv in the north.</p> <p>Near Kyiv, Russian forces gained control of the town of Bucha and moved southwest in an attempt to encircle the capital. They were also approaching Kyiv from the east, with heavy fighting involving a line of Russian tanks reported in the suburb of Brovary, according to videos posted online on Thursday.</p>

In Mariupol, 70 bodies have been buried since Tuesday, without coffins, in a mass grave, according to video recorded by The Associated Press, and local officials said an airstrike that destroyed a maternity hospital on Wednesday had killed three people, including a child. In Chernihiv, residents lacked electricity, gas for cooking or warding off the winter cold, or even space to bury the dead, said the mayor, Vladyslav Atroshenko.

“Dozens of people have died,” he said. “Dozens of multistory buildings have been ruined. Thousands of people have no place to live.”

President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine, in his latest video message, said the hospital bombing in Mariupol, a port on the Sea of Azov, was further “proof that the genocide of Ukrainians is taking place.”

Despite photographs of the ravaged hospital and victims of the bombing, corroborated by the United Nations, Russian officials denied having hit the hospital, or alternatively said it had not been used as a hospital. Attacks on medical facilities can constitute war crimes.

The chief economic adviser to Ukraine’s government, Oleg Ustenko, estimated that his country had already suffered \$100 billion in damage since the invasion began Feb. 24. “The situation is a disaster that is really much deeper than somebody can imagine,” Mr. Ustenko said at a [Peterson Institute for International Economics virtual event](#).

Vice President Kamala Harris, in Warsaw to meet with Polish officials, said Russians should be investigated for war crimes in Ukraine, though she did not name any individuals. Ms. Harris, a former prosecutor, said, “I have no question the eyes of the world are on this war and what Russia has done in terms of the aggression and these atrocities.”

President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia has insisted that Ukraine disarm, guarantee that it will never join the NATO alliance and officially cede parts of its land by recognizing two Russian-backed separatist regions as independent countries and accepting Russia’s 2014 annexation of Crimea.

Mr. Putin’s false claims that Ukraine’s government is run by Nazis and that his goal is “denazification” of the country suggest, as Western governments have charged, that he intends to install a puppet government in Kyiv. But conflicting statements from Moscow have left unclear whether he intends to occupy some or all of the country, or annex more of it, or how far he would go in devastating Ukraine in order to subjugate it.

“Putin’s military plan to quickly capture Ukraine, it is clear now, has failed,” Ned Price, the State Department spokesman, told reporters in Washington on Thursday. “So he’s now turning to a strategy of laying waste to population centers, to try to break the will of the people of Ukraine — something he will not be able to do.”

On Thursday, Congress approved \$13.6 billion in emergency aid for Ukraine as part of a \$1.5 trillion spending bill. President Biden was expected to quickly sign the legislation.

On Friday, Mr. Biden will announce that the United States will join the G7 and the European Union in calling for the suspension of normal trade relations with Russia, according to a person familiar with the announcement, who was not authorized to speak publicly about it. Each country will implement the suspension based on its own national processes, the person said.

Besides the thousands of Ukrainian soldiers and civilians killed since the invasion began, a U.S. official estimated that 5,000 to 6,000 Russian troops had died. The figure was roughly double the estimate of 3,000 just days earlier, but experts cautioned that casualty numbers are difficult to assess. Ukraine has estimated far more Russian casualties, and Russia has acknowledged far fewer.

Mr. Putin on Thursday played down the effects of intensified Western sanctions, even though they are already crippling Russia's economy and have been compounded by the withdrawal of hundreds of Western businesses that had operated in Russia. Three decades of economic engagement with the world since the fall of the Soviet Union have unraveled in a matter of days.

"In the end, it will enhance our independence, self-sufficiency and sovereignty," Mr. Putin said at a meeting of government officials. And he referred to the possibility that Russia could nationalize the assets of foreign companies that have left.

The European Union and Britain added more wealthy Russian individuals and organizations to their blacklists of those, now numbering well over 1,000, facing direct sanctions like asset freezes and travel bans. In Britain they included Roman Abramovich, owner of the elite Chelsea soccer team, effectively taking control of the team away from him.

Mr. Abramovich has denied links to Mr. Putin, but the British government — often accused of catering to wealthy foreigners who invest in the country — said that in fact they had a "close relationship" for decades, and that Mr. Abramovich had benefited financially from it.

In another outcome of the war, worries also were rising Thursday over the Russian seizures of nuclear power stations at Chernobyl, the defunct plant that is home to the world's worst nuclear accident, and Zaporizhzhia, the biggest nuclear producer of electricity in Europe.

Outside power to Chernobyl has been cut, forcing it to operate on backup generators; without power, it cannot keep spent nuclear fuel safely stored, risking a radiation release. While plants continue to be managed by Ukrainian staff, experts say the conditions raise serious safety questions.

Rafael M. Grossi, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, described "a very dire situation" at the plants, adding, "We need to move fast." Mr. Grossi met Thursday with Mr. Lavrov and Mr. Kuleba in Turkey and said both sides had agreed to negotiate safety arrangements for the plants.

Before the invasion, Western analysts and even many Ukrainian commanders expected Russia's much larger and more technologically advanced military to quickly overwhelm the Ukrainian forces, capturing Kyiv and other major cities. But the Russians have advanced slowly, taking just one large city, Kherson, as they have faced logistical setbacks. The Ukrainians, armed by the United States and its allies, have vexed the invaders with an unexpectedly stiff defense.

"Russian forces have likely begun renewed offensive operations into Kyiv and to continue its encirclement on the west, but have not made much progress," said the latest assessment from the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based group monitoring the conflict.

The Russian military is still capable of completely surrounding Kyiv in a week or two, a U.S. official said, and the battle for the city could take a month or more.

Apparently frustrated by their slow progress, Russia's forces have increasingly hit civilian targets indiscriminately and laid siege to cities like Kharkiv, Mariupol, Chernihiv, Sumy and Mykolaiv, leaving people short of food, water, power, heat and medicines.

Mariupol in particular, bombarded by the Russians and fiercely defended by Ukrainian fighters, has become [a humanitarian disaster](#) for the hundreds of thousands of desperate civilians trapped there. People have felled trees to burn for heat and cooking, and local authorities have instructed residents to wrap the dead and leave them outside for collection.

The bombing of the maternity hospital on Wednesday — along with other civilian buildings — sent bloodied, pregnant women fleeing into the surrounding rubble and added to a death toll that local officials say numbers at least in the hundreds.

“Bombs are falling in Mariupol all the time,” said Halyna Odnoroh, an activist who managed to leave the city but whose daughter remained there. “Buildings are falling to the ground as if they were made of matchsticks. We need help!”

Agreements on establishing “humanitarian corridors,” to allow civilians to leave cities and essential aid to enter, have repeatedly collapsed. Ukraine claims that continued Russian bombardment and blockades have made such movement impossible, which Russia denies.

The Russian military on Thursday offered escape corridors — not westward, where the overwhelming majority of Ukrainians are fleeing, but eastward, to Russia.

As diplomatic jockeying over the war intensified around the world, China on Thursday doubled down on its claim, backing up Russian allegations, that the United States was developing biological weapons in Ukraine, which American officials heatedly dismissed as “outright lies.” China has drawn closer to Russia in confrontation with their common adversary, the United States, but has signaled that it wants the Ukraine conflict resolved peacefully.

“Russia is inventing false pretexts in an attempt to justify its own horrific actions in Ukraine,” the State Department said in a statement, while the White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, [wrote on Twitter](#) that the claim was “preposterous.”

Russia’s Defense Ministry has released documents it claims to have discovered detailing Pentagon-funded “secret biological experiments” at laboratories in two Ukrainian cities, Kharkiv and Poltava. Their veracity could not be determined. The Institute for the Study of War [issued its own warning on Wednesday](#) that Russia’s claims could be part of an effort to lay the groundwork for a Russian chemical or biological attack.

Ms. Harris, on a three-day trip to Poland and Romania, and President Andrzej Duda of Poland deflected several questions about a proposed transfer of Soviet-made fighter jets to Ukraine. Poland, not wanting to transfer them directly, had said it would give the jets to the United States in return for newer ones, and the Americans could forward them to Ukraine.

U.S. officials said the plan was unworkable, but they have not made it clear whether Washington sees supplying warplanes — an escalation in the type of weaponry going to Kyiv — as too provocative.

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HEADLINE	03/10 Russia nuclear arsenal casts shadow in war
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/10/russias-massive-nuclear-arsenal-hangs-over-war-ukr/
GIST	<p>Russia’s economy is smaller than Italy’s, and its military has yet to impress two weeks into its invasion of Ukraine. Still, the West is treating the crisis as a potential precursor to World War III for one simple reason: Moscow’s massive stockpile of nuclear warheads and the growing fear that Russian President Vladimir Putin may resort to using the world’s most devastating weapons.</p> <p>Most of Western media’s focus has centered on the unfolding horror on the ground. Far less discussion has been about the potential for unprecedented nuclear escalation that could lead to millions of casualties across the continent.</p> <p>Mr. Putin warned NATO nations last month of “consequences you have never seen” if they intervene in Ukraine. Days later, he put Russia’s nuclear forces in an undefined state of “special combat readiness.”</p> <p>“No one should have any doubts that a direct attack on our country will lead to the destruction and horrible consequences for any potential aggressor,” Mr. Putin warned in his Feb. 24 declaration of war. Russia, he said, is “one of the most potent nuclear powers and also has a certain edge in a range of state-of-the-art weapons.”</p>

Russia's cache of more than 6,200 nuclear warheads is the largest in the world, according to the Arms Control Association, and has added an untold level of danger and complexity to the military campaign in Ukraine. Other recent conflicts, such as last year's Armenia-Azerbaijan clash and ongoing civil wars in Yemen, Ethiopia and Syria, have killed more combatants but lacked a nuclear element. The risk for major escalation was relatively low.

The war in Ukraine, on the other hand, has the potential to quickly devolve into a world-altering nuclear showdown. U.S. officials said they had seen little evidence that Mr. Putin followed through on a claim that he had put his nation's nuclear assets on high alert. Still, analysts warn that the U.S. and its NATO allies cannot write off the prospect of an increasingly erratic Russian leader turning to nuclear weapons as his last option to reclaim old Soviet territory across Eastern Europe.

"Remember, few thought Putin would launch a full-scale invasion, which has now become the largest assault in Europe since World War II. Strong powers completely failed to deter a conventional attack by a weak one, so we should now be prepared for deterrence to fail again," Gordon Chang, a longtime foreign affairs analyst and distinguished senior fellow at the Gatestone Institute, wrote in a piece for Newsweek.

"If Putin's nuke threats prevent others coming to Ukraine's rescue, he will undoubtedly employ similar warnings to grab the Baltic states, Poland and other areas," he said. "The ambitious Russian leader wants to reassemble the Soviet Union, but it looks like he also harbors even grander ambitions, such as incorporating all the territories of the old Russian Empire. He may even be looking for more than that."

U.S. intelligence chiefs, including Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines, told Congress this week that they had detected no "unusual" activity in Russia's nuclear forces, but they warned that Mr. Putin is likely to grow increasingly desperate if his military gamble in Ukraine fails to pay off.

"Putin feels aggrieved the West does not give him proper deference and perceives this as a war he cannot afford to lose," Ms. Haines said. She noted that Russia's army had "begun to loosen its rules of engagement to achieve their military objective" in Ukraine.

President Biden late last month simply said "no" when asked whether Americans should be concerned about a potential nuclear war. Mr. Chang said that stance is misguided.

"The correct answer was 'yes,'" he said.

Nuclear escalation

With the world's biggest nuclear weapons arsenal, Russia edges out its only real competitor, the U.S. It's a legacy of the Soviet Union's status as a global superpower.

Russia has at least 1,458 strategic warheads deployed on intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles and strategic bombers, according to data from the Washington-based Arms Control Association.

Moscow has thousands of other nuclear warheads, though about 1,760 of those are theoretically retired and awaiting disarmament. Complicating the equation is that some of Russia's nuclear weapons are lower-yield "tactical" nuclear weapons that could be dropped into a theater like Ukraine without immediately threatening the U.S. or its NATO allies.

In recent years, Russia has embraced what strategists call an "escalate-to-deescalate" nuclear strategy that in part envisions deploying a lesser nuclear weapon in a conflict and putting the onus on the adversary to either respond or stand down.

The U.S. has more than 5,500 nuclear warheads. China, France, Britain, Pakistan, India and Israel have much smaller arsenals.

Numbers tell only part of the story. A much greater threat lies in Mr. Putin's apparent willingness to use nuclear weapons, or at least the threat of them, to get what he wants.

It's something of a trump card for Mr. Putin. His nation's military might is coming under serious question amid a blundering campaign in Ukraine that has moved much slower than expected. Russia's economic power was already severely limited before the West unleashed an unprecedented slate of sanctions and major companies across all sectors announced they would stop doing business in Russia.

Nuclear weapons remain arguably Russia's best way to get the world's attention. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told his country's RIA Novosti news agency last week that a third world war would include nuclear weapons. It was a not-so-subtle warning to the West as it tries to stop further incursions into Eastern Europe.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said unequivocally this week that the U.S. is prepared for war if Russian troops try to cross into NATO territory, including the Baltic states of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia, which were part of the Soviet Union.

"We will defend every inch of NATO territory with the full force of our collective power," Mr. Blinken said.

The "full force" of NATO's power, in theory, would include nuclear weapons. Some Western officials have offered warnings about the prospects of a full-blown nuclear exchange in Europe.

"Yes, I think that Vladimir Putin must also understand that the Atlantic alliance is a nuclear alliance. That is all I will say about this," French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told reporters late last month.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who has desperately pressed NATO for greater military support to ward off Russian forces, dismissed Mr. Putin's nuclear talk as "a bluff."

"It's one thing to be a murderer. It's another to commit suicide," Mr. Zelenskyy told the German publication Die Zeit in an interview Wednesday. Mr. Putin's threat, he said "shows a weakness. You threaten the use of nuclear weapons only when nothing else is working. I am sure that Russia is aware of the catastrophic consequences of any attempt to use nuclear weapons."

U.S. officials say they don't have the luxury of being complacent about nuclear weapons.

Army Lt. Gen. D. Scott Berrier, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, testified Tuesday alongside Ms. Haines at a hearing of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. He warned that the danger of nuclear escalation in Eastern Europe is real and that Mr. Putin has invested in developing new tactical nuclear arms that provide an asymmetric military advantage.

"I also believe that when he says something, we should listen very, very carefully and take him at his word," he told the committee.

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HEADLINE	03/10 US: NKorea tested new ICBM system
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/10/north-korea-tested-new-intercontinental-ballistic/
GIST	<p>North Korea over the past several weeks carried out two tests of a new intercontinental ballistic missile system, Pentagon officials said Thursday, and Pyongyang could be preparing to carry out more tests disguised as space launches.</p> <p>Defense officials said North Korea carried out tests on Feb. 26 and March 4. They appeared to be the initial tests of a new ICBM system that North Korea first unveiled during a military parade last October.</p>

	<p>“The purpose of these tests, which did not demonstrate ICBM range, was likely to evaluate this new system before conducting a test at full range in the future, potentially disguised as a space launch,” Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said in a statement. “The United States strongly condemns these launches, which are a brazen violation of multiple United Nations Security Council resolutions, needlessly raise tensions and risk destabilizing the security situation in the region.”</p> <p>“We have been and will continue to coordinate closely with our allies and partners to address the threats posed by [North Korea] and to advance our shared objective of the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula,” he said.</p> <p>Mr. Kirby said that in response to the North Korean tests, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command earlier this week “ordered intensified surveillance activity” in the Yellow Sea off the Korean coast. U.S. military personnel also have “enhanced readiness” of U.S. ballistic missiles in the region.</p> <p>The tests involved a missile that is reportedly larger than the ICBM tested in 2017. That test sparked then-President Trump’s warning of “fire and fury,” though he eventually embarked on a diplomatic path with North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/11 Ukraine ‘disagreement’ outside the West
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/11/a-necessary-war-reporting-on-the-ukraine-disagreement-outside-the-west
GIST	<p>Many an insult has been hurled at Vladimir Putin since he invaded Ukraine a fortnight ago, causing chaos, heartbreak and death. A bloodstained aggressor. A 21st-century Stalin. A total f***** dickhead. Beelzebub.</p> <p>“Look at the face of Putin. You will see the devil,” one US commentator opined on Wednesday as a maternity hospital was bombed in the city of Mariupol.</p> <p>But for the Venezuelan pundit Alberto Aranguibel, Putin’s 24 February invasion was “la guerra necesaria” – the necessary war.</p> <p>The Chinese academic Wang Shuo saw it as “a US-created crisis”. “The strategic selfishness of the US has brought more disasters to the world,” Wang grumbled on Wednesday in the state-run Global Times, blaming Washington’s “selfish and short-sighted action” for plunging Ukraine into war.</p> <p>And for the editorial board at Mexico’s La Jornada newspaper, it was time to abandon the unhelpful fantasy that Putin’s “ambition and wickedness” was the sole culprit and face “the difficult truth” of how Nato’s eastward push had paved the way for disaster.</p> <p>“The west’s horror at Putin’s actions should be placed in the context of the shameful history of western powers’ involvement in illegal wars,” said an article in the prominent South African newspaper the Daily Maverick, pondering South Africa’s perceived neutral position on the war.</p> <p>“Has the west’s response to the Ukraine invasion been hypocritical? Unequivocally: yes,” the author argued, before also condemning Putin’s “unjustifiable and illegal onslaught on a sovereign state”.</p> <p>Much of the coverage exploring western hypocrisy has come from predictable quarters: state-run media outlets in authoritarian Russia allies such as Venezuela, North Korea, Syria, Cuba and China, where pro-regime journalists have largely shunned the word “invasion”.</p> <p>“When will they sanction the US for its crimes and invasions?” Telesur’s Venezuela correspondent, Madelein García, wondered this week after Joe Biden announced a ban on Russian oil imports.</p> <p>The Chavista commentator Aranguibel painted Putin not as an aggressor but the victim of “the most brutal and intense demonisation campaign ever seen”. “[The campaign is] perhaps only comparable to the one</p>

that's been waged against president Nicolás Maduro for at least a decade," [Aranguibel wrote](#) in Últimas Noticias, a pro-government tabloid, although the anti-US tone in Venezuela's pro-regime media appeared to soften after [talks with Biden officials](#) last Saturday.

China's official news agency, Xinhua, calls the conflict "the Ukraine situation". while North Korea's state-run KCNA agency has called western sanctions an "abuse of power".

"The root cause of the Ukraine crisis totally lies in the hegemonic policy of the US and the west, which enforce themselves in high-handedness and abuse of power against other countries," KCNA quoted a foreign ministry official as saying.

In Taipei, meanwhile, media outlets pondered if Russia's actions set a worrying precedent for [Taiwan](#), where the threat of an invasion by China looms large. Headlines asked: "Ukraine today, Taiwan tomorrow?"

Granma, the mouthpiece for Cuba's Communist party, slammed the "Yankee empire's ruthless campaign" against Russia while downplaying the conflict as a "[desacuerdo](#)" (disagreement) between Moscow and Kyiv.

In Syria, state media have been fully behind Bashar al-Assad, who has backed Putin's war from the outset after [Russia](#) helped him secure his own position in Syria over the last seven years.

But criticism of western double standards has not been limited to state media outlets in Russian allies.

An opinion article in the South African daily the Mail & Guardian called the conflict "[soaked in contradictions](#)", criticising western media coverage and government responses that appeared to frame the war in Ukraine as worse than other conflicts outside Europe.

"Even as we deplore the violence and the loss of life in Ukraine resulting from the Russian intervention ... it is valuable to step back and look at how the rest of the world may perceive this conflict," it said.

"Fear of domination, potential enemies spur Russia's invasion," read a [headline](#) in the Guardian in Nigeria, reflecting widely held beliefs about perceived Nato expansionist aims in Europe being partially to blame.

Yan Boechat, a Brazilian journalist who is [reporting on the humanitarian crisis from Kyiv](#), scoffed at the "cynical, hypocritical" tears being shed by the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, over victims of the Ukraine conflict, given the carnage his country's military had caused in Iraq.

"Under Obama, the US was just as cruel in Mosul as Putin. Nobody was left to mourn the dead. US planes killed them all," Boechat [tweeted](#), recalling how he had stumbled over body parts while reporting from [the devastated Iraqi city](#) six months after the war there.

"Unfortunately, cruelty, barbarity and injustice aren't unique to Putin and the Russians," the Brazilian journalist concluded. "Victims are mourned depending on the aggressor. [But] they are all victims: civilians who are Ukrainian, Iraqi, Syrian, Afghan."

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HEADLINE	03/10 Consumers vent fury over Ukraine invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/10/ukraine-war-sparks-anti-russian-consumer-protests-and-action-worldwide
GIST	A day or so after Vladimir Putin launched his invasion of Ukraine, Sergiy Skorokhvatov decided it might not be a bad idea to go online and clarify what kind of food was on the menu at his Russian and Ukrainian restaurant in central Madrid.

His instincts proved correct. Despite the fact that Skorokhvatov is Ukrainian, and despite the fact that the family's restaurant serves both Ukrainian and Russian food, its name – Rasputin – swiftly incurred the wrath of some keyboard warriors.

“Someone called me and said it was a good move because another Russian restaurant had been getting reviews saying things like ‘We shouldn’t be spending any of our euros in Russian places’,” Skorokhvatov told the Guardian.

“I thought that changing things would help us, but then people started posting similar stuff about us – ‘Don’t go to Russian restaurants’ – and pictures of blown-up buildings in [Ukraine](#).”

Skorokhvatov, whose parents are still in Kyiv, managed to get Google to take down the political reviews and photos. He is now weighing up whether to change the name of the restaurant his family bought almost four years ago.

His experiences are just one example of the many ways in which people around the world are venting their fury at Russia's campaign in Ukraine.

Earlier this week Maison de la Poutine, a French restaurant chain serving the French-Canadian favourite poutine – chips, cheese curds and gravy – [complained of receiving insults and threats](#) because of the similarity, in French, between the name of the emblematic dish and that of the bellicose Russian president. Advertisement

In [Canada](#), a Russian pianist was pulled from an upcoming set of performances – even though he had spoken out against the war in Ukraine. The Montreal Symphony Orchestra said in a statement it would be “inappropriate” for 20-year old Alexander Malofeev to perform a series of concertos this week.

Malofeev, who has family members in Ukraine, has previously criticized Russia's “terrible and bloody” decision to invade the country. The Montreal symphony said it would welcome back Malofeev “when the context allows it.”

On Wednesday, the Cardiff Philharmonic Orchestra announced that it had decided to [exclude Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture](#) from a performance next week. It explained that playing the piece – which commemorates Russia's victory over Napoleon's invading forces – would be “inappropriate” given events in Ukraine.

Others have opted for more direct action. In [Ireland](#), opposition to the Russian invasion has been focused on the country's embassy in Dublin, whose gates were forced open after a truck deliberately reversed in to the estate earlier this week.

The driver, who was charged with criminal damage, said he had felt compelled to act after seeing the pictures that went around the world of a woman and her children [lying dead on the street in Irpin](#).

A priest was also arrested last week after dousing the embassy gates with red paint.

“I feel frightened and powerless,” Father Fergal MacDonagh said. “The only thing I could do was, in solidarity with the people of Ukraine, to pour paint on the gates on the building that is spreading lies and deceit and misinformation about what is happening.” The priest added that he would be “delighted” to be charged.

Local councillors are taking a longer-term approach, and have [voted to change the name of the street](#) where the embassy is situated from Orwell Road to Independent Ukraine Road.

Similar thinking is under way in Jerusalem, where the Putin pub has become “the pub formerly known as the Putin”.

The 20-year-old institution on Jaffa Street, the main drag in west Jerusalem, is beloved for its cheap drinks, convivial atmosphere and, occasionally, its Russian-language karaoke.

Its former owners decided to call it Putin as a gimmick: they opened when the former KGB lieutenant colonel was running for president for the first time. But on the day the Russian leader invaded Ukraine, the current owner, Leonid Teterin, removed the big gold letters spelling out “Putin” from the sign.

“We condemn the war and support Ukraine and its people,” Teterin, a Russian-born Israeli, told Israel’s Channel 12 news.

Staff have been asking customers to suggest a new name. The most popular idea so far is the Zelenskiy pub in honour of Ukraine’s Jewish president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

Bars and restaurants in Brazil’s culinary capital, São Paulo, have also embarked on a nomenclature offensive.

On Tuesday, the celebrated Brazilian chef Janaína Rueda announced she would protest Putin’s “sad war” by [refusing to serve stroganoff](#) at her restaurant in São Paulo.

“This is our way of showing our support for the Ukrainians ... We’re rooting for peace,” Rueda said. The defiance, however, was short-lived and the stroganoff boycott was reversed after 24 hours following an online backlash against what many saw as a pointless gesture.

At least half a dozen cocktail bars have also taken the Moscow Mule off their menu – and replaced it with the Kyiv or Ukraine Mule.

As he waited for the lunchtime crowd to arrive in Madrid on Thursday, Skorokhvatov tried to explain how he felt about the manner in which some people were responding to the war in his homeland.

“I understand the passion – and that people want to do something to help but don’t know how,” he said. “So some of them go online and post stuff. I’m a little surprised by how some people are, I guess. They’re short-sighted and don’t do any research.”

But, added Skorokhvatov, others had found far more useful ways to express their solidarity: “You can go and donate and you hear of people getting in their cars and going to Ukraine without even knowing where they’re going.”

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HEADLINE	03/11 UK warns Russia against chemical weapons
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/mar/11/uk-minister-warns-russia-against-using-chemical-weapons-in-ukraine
GIST	<p>Russia can expect a “dramatic increased response” from the west if Vladimir Putin uses chemical weapons in Ukraine, a minister has said, amid fears that a false pretext is being laid by Moscow for such an attack.</p> <p>Chris Philp, the technology minister, accused Russia of sharing disinformation online to create a false narrative that Ukraine is preparing to use chemical weapons, so that Russia can launch its own chemical attack.</p> <p>His comments echo those made on Thursday by Boris Johnson, who said he feared that the “barbaric” regime in the Kremlin may be ready to use the banned weapons as the invading Russian forces had failed to make the progress expected.</p> <p>Philp told Sky News: “We have seen in the last 24 or 48 hours what appear to be bits of disinformation published by Russian state outlets, including in fact the Russian embassy here in London, putting on things</p>

like Twitter information that appear to be creating a false narrative that Ukrainians are considering using chemical weapons, which is clearly ridiculous and totally untrue.

“Sometimes they do that in preparation but I hope that’s not what they’re contemplating. The use of chemical weapons in any theatre of war, certainly one where there are lots of civilians, is totally unacceptable.”

Philp said any such use of weapons would “trigger an increased response from the west”.

He told Times Radio: “Clearly, the use of chemical weapons, especially in an invasion where there are a very large number of civilians, would be an outrage against humanity. I would say to anybody in Russia thinking about this: do not cross that line, do not inflict any more misery and suffering on the Ukrainian people.

“They’ve already been shooting civilians who are fleeing down humanitarian escape corridors, they’ve been bombing and shelling hospitals including a children’s/maternity hospital. Do not go any further in inflicting misery on the Ukrainian people.

“It will trigger an increased response from the west, there’s a dramatic increased response, there’s no question about that. I’m not going to speculate about the form that’s going to take or pre-empt it, but that’s a line that Russian governments should not cross.”

Johnson and the foreign secretary, Liz Truss, have raised fears of the use of chemical weapons by Russian forces, while the White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, said the world should be “on the lookout” for the Russian use of chemical and biological weaponry.

Johnson said on Thursday: “The stuff which you are hearing about chemical weapons is straight out of the Russian playbook. They start saying that there are chemical weapons that are being stored by their opponents or by the Americans, so that when they themselves deploy chemical weapons – as I fear they may – they have a sort of a *maskirovka*, a fake story, ready to go.”

In a reference to the [Salisbury nerve agent attack](#), he added: “You have seen it in Syria, you saw it even in the UK. I just note that is what they are already doing. It is a cynical, barbaric government, I’m afraid.”

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HEADLINE	03/11 Russia can't pay debts after sanctions?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/11/what-happens-if-russia-cant-pay-its-debts-after-western-sanctions
GIST	<p>Russia is close to being unable to pay its debts amid sanctions imposed by the west after Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>The World Bank’s chief economist, Carmen Reinhart, warned on Thursday that Russia and its ally Belarus were “mightily close” to default.</p> <p>A key test will come on Wednesday next week, when the Russian state has to make a \$117m (£89m) payment on some of its debts denominated in US dollars. While Russia has relatively low debts and its financial system is less integrated with the rest of the world than other countries’, some analysts warn an imminent Russian debt default could have unforeseen consequences.</p> <p>What happens in a default?</p> <p>A default occurs when a borrower fails to make agreed payments on their debts.</p> <p>The Bank of Canada and Bank of England, which track global sovereign defaults, estimate the total value of government debt in default around the world was \$443.2bn in 2020 – about 0.5% of world public debt.</p>

Recent governments to default include Argentina, Belize, Ecuador and Suriname, with nations typically failing to keep up on payments denominated in foreign currencies. Some have strong track records, including the US and the UK. However, both have defaulted in the past – including Britain in 1672 under the reign of Charles II and the US in 1862 during the American civil war.

Russia must make two coupon, or regular interest, payments on 16 March. However, it will have a 30-day grace period, meaning a default would not formally happen until at least April.

When was the last time Russia defaulted?

Russia has defaulted before, including during the 1917 revolution and in 1998, when the country's economy remained weak after the collapse of the Soviet union and the costs of war in Chechnya meant it was unable to keep up with its debt payments. However, even then, Russia kept up with dollar payments.

The so-called rouble crisis caused severe damage for neighbouring economies and sent shock waves through the global financial system, including huge losses for the US hedge fund Long-Term Capital Management.

What's at stake

Russia has strengthened its financial position in recent years in response to western sanctions imposed after the 2014 annexation of Crimea, with the government running budget surpluses and cutting its reliance on the US dollar.

According to the Institute of International Finance (IIF), Russia's external liabilities – money owed to creditors by the government, companies and households – have fallen from about \$733bn in 2014 to about \$480bn. Of this, \$135bn is due to be paid to creditors within one year.

However, the amount owed by the government itself is relatively small. The state has about \$40bn in foreign currency bonds denominated in dollars and euros – tiny compared with the size of its economy and with several comparable nations. Overseas investors also hold \$28bn of Russian debt denominated in roubles.

However, the scale of the problem is bigger for Russian corporates, with just under \$100bn in international bonds outstanding.

Investors in Russian debt include hedge funds, which prefer taking risky bets, and major global asset managers. According to the Financial Times, the US fund manager Pimco, one of the world's biggest bond market investors, has amassed a [\\$1.5bn position in Russian sovereign debt](#).

Why could Russia default?

Western sanctions on Russia's central bank and the country's biggest lenders are causing disruption for financial transactions. Moscow has also imposed capital controls in response, including suspending the transfer of coupon payments on sovereign debt to foreign investors.

Russia's finance ministry has said it will service and pay sovereign debts in full and on time. However, Putin has said Russian entities can pay their foreign currency debts in roubles priced at exchange rates set by the Russian central bank to residents of "countries that engage in hostile activities".

While Russia would have had enough foreign currency to cover debt payments, having amassed \$630bn in reserves, the US, UK and EU freezing the assets of its central bank have made much of this sum inaccessible.

The rating agency Fitch [downgraded Russia's sovereign debt to its second-lowest level](#) earlier this week, saying a default was "imminent".

What could be the consequences for Russia?

Debt defaults make it harder and more expensive to borrow in future, given the reputational damage.

However, Russia is already isolated on the global stage after the invasion of Ukraine. Western governments have also blocked the Russian state from raising new money on capital markets, including in London and New York.

According to the IIF, sanctions pushing up the cost of funding is likely to hit the government's financial position, potentially forcing Moscow to cut spending or raise taxes.

What could the consequences be elsewhere?

Targeting Russia's financial system is intended to inflict economic pain inside the country, although there could be indirect effects on the wider global banking system.

However, many economists, including Andrew Bailey, the governor of the Bank of England, have suggested Russia's financial linkages to the rest of the world are small and not of systemic importance.

Foreign banks have about \$121bn in exposure to Russia, mainly in [Europe](#), according to data from the Bank of International Settlements. The IIF estimates foreign banks play a minor role in the country, holding only 6.3% of total assets.

The country's corporate sector mainly relies on loans for funding from state-owned banks. Foreign participation in the Russian sovereign debt market currently stands at 20% of total outstanding debt, with political uncertainty since 2014 discouraging overseas buyers.

The World Bank's Reinhart told Reuters that repercussions had been limited thus far, but risks could still emerge.

"I worry about what I do not see," she said. "Financial institutions are well-capitalised, but balance sheets are often opaque ... There is the issue of Russian private sector defaults. One cannot be complacent."

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HEADLINE	03/10 Spokane airport gets new airline and flights
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/travel/spokane-new-airline-flights/293-bd84c822-f763-4600-b67b-787179ce4caa
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — Spokane International Airport announced a new airline and new nonstop destination on Thursday that will be coming to the airport.</p> <p>Avelo Airlines is launching flights between Spokane and Burbank, Calif. Flights will be available on Wednesdays and Saturdays starting May 25.</p> <p>Passengers can book tickets now, with fares starting at \$69 one-way. However, flights must be booked by March 24 to take advantage of the introductory fare. There are additional fees for carry-on and checked bags, as well as assigned seats.</p> <p>Regular daily flights will depart Spokane at 10:15 a.m. and arrive in Burbank at 12:55 p.m. Flights from Burbank leave at 7:00 a.m. and arrive in Spokane at 9:35 a.m.</p> <p>Avelo will fly 189-seat Boeing Next-Generation 737-800 aircraft on the route.</p> <p>"The Los Angeles Basin continues to be an important market for us," Larry Krauter, CEO of Spokane International Airport said. "The addition of Burbank to the Airport's nonstop offerings helps to fulfill high passenger demand between the Spokane/Coeur d'Alene Region and Southern California, just in time for the summer travel season. It also allows an affordable opportunity for residents in the Los Angeles area to visit and explore our region."</p> <p>Avelo is a relatively new airline, having launched in April 2021 with its home base in Burbank.</p>

The announcement follows several new airlines that have come to Spokane in the past few months. [Aha! Airlines launched service](#) between Spokane and Reno in December. [Sun Country Airlines announced](#) it will start flying between Spokane and Minneapolis in June.

Canada-based carrier WestJet has previously announced an interest in flying to Spokane. According to [airlinegeeks.com](#), WestJet filed an application with the U.S. Department of Transportation to begin service in Spokane as WestJet Link.

If the application is approved, WestJet would launch daily flights between Spokane and Calgary along with Spokane and Vancouver. WestJet plans to use Saab 340 turboprop aircraft which seat 34 passengers.

Spokane International Airport growth

The announcement comes at a [time of growth](#) for Spokane International Airport.

In 2019, the airport saw record traffic with more than 4 million passengers. By 2030, the airport expects to serve more than 6.2 million passengers.

Part of that long-range plan includes the terminal expansion project--referred to as TREX. The project includes:

- Terminal C expansion
- New security checkpoint for Terminals A and B
- New central baggage claim hall
- New curbside canopy

The airport also recently [re-aligned the road](#) leading to the terminals, which created more parking.

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HEADLINE	03/10 Prolonged period wet, active weather
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/weather/prolonged-period-of-wet-active-weather-to-begin-saturday-in-pacific-northwest
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Rain and mountain snow will return to the Pacific Northwest late Saturday and continue through Tuesday.</p> <p>The first round will come on Saturday, associated with an area of low pressure moving into Vancouver Island.</p> <p>Strong winds will impact the coast with gusts as high as 60 mph, in addition to moderate to heavy rain. Small hail and a few thunderstorms will also be possible.</p> <p>Impactful mountain-pass snow is possible, with at least 8 to 12 inches at Stevens and Snoqualmie passes in Washington. Those with travel interests across the passes late Saturday into Sunday will want to prepare for winter travel conditions.</p> <p>After a brief break, the region will then be impacted by a moderate atmospheric river late Sunday through Monday night.</p> <p>Multiple inches of precipitation is expected, leading to the potential of river flooding into the middle of next week. The most responsive Skokomish River will likely reach flood stage, as at least 3 to 6 inches of rain is predicted from Saturday night through Monday night.</p> <p>The National Weather Service said forecast snow levels look to range from 4,000 to 6,000 feet from north to south across western Washington.</p> <p>The active and wet pattern will persist through much of next week as quick shots of rain and mountain snow push across the region.</p>

	Temperatures will be seasonable, with highs generally in the lower 50s and lows in the lower 40s.
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HEADLINE	03/10 Russia to nationalize Western businesses?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/10/world/europe/russia-economy-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>Besieged by an onslaught of sanctions that have largely undone 30 years of economic integration with the West in the space of two weeks, President Vladimir V. Putin on Thursday opened the door to nationalizing the assets of Western companies pulling out of Russia and exhorted senior officials to “act decisively” to preserve jobs.</p> <p>With Russia in danger of defaulting on its sovereign debt and facing a sharp contraction in its economy, the West is betting that the looming, generation-defining economic crisis could make Russians turn on their president. It is also possible, however, that the crisis could end up strengthening Mr. Putin, validating his narrative that the West is determined to destroy Russia.</p> <p>“I have no doubt that these sanctions would have been implemented no matter what,” Mr. Putin said in televised remarks on Thursday, arguing that his intervention in Ukraine served merely as a pretext for the West to try to wreck Russia’s economy. “Just as we overcame these difficulties in years past, we will overcome them now, too.”</p> <p>But the sanctions imposed in the two weeks since the invasion — combined with multinational companies that employ tens of thousands of Russians voluntarily deciding to withdraw amid the global outrage — dwarf any other economic pressure that Russia has faced under Mr. Putin.</p> <p>With the ruble having lost nearly half its value in the last month, prices of basic goods have risen sharply, causing panic buying at supermarkets. The central bank, which has kept the Moscow stock exchange closed since the war began, has introduced new capital controls, preventing companies from withdrawing more than \$5,000 in cash for the next six months.</p> <p>“This will be a gigantic, transformational downturn,” said Ruben Enikolopov, rector of the New Economic School in Moscow.</p> <p>The Institute of International Finance, a Washington-based association of financial firms, predicted that Russia would see a 15-percent decline in its gross domestic product this year, which would wipe out much of the economic growth that Mr. Putin has presided over since taking office in 1999.</p> <p>And things could get even worse. Further escalation of the war could lead more countries to refuse to buy Russian energy, the institute’s economists said, “which would drastically impair Russia’s ability to import goods and services, deepening the recession.”</p> <p>The alarm with which Russian planners view the downturn is reflected in the radical measures they have proposed to arrest it.</p> <p>Of particular concern are Western companies that once symbolized post-Soviet Russia’s integration into the world economy, like McDonald’s and Ikea, that have now shuttered hundreds of stores and factories. Mr. Putin told officials in the televised meeting that the assets of such companies should be put under “external management” and then transferred “to those who want to work.”</p> <p>Dmitri A. Medvedev, the vice chairman of Mr. Putin’s security council, said the Kremlin could respond to Western companies leaving the Russian market with the seizure of their assets “and their possible nationalization.”</p> <p>The prospect of the Kremlin seizing private assets rattled Russia’s business community. Vladimir Potanin, a metals magnate who is one of Russia’s richest men, released a statement warning that such</p>

nationalization would “bring us back 100 years, to 1917” — the year of the Russian Revolution, when the Bolsheviks forcibly took over private enterprises.

Russian oligarchs are facing their own threat to their assets. On Thursday, the British government placed new sanctions on seven prominent Russian businessmen, including [Roman Abramovich](#), the owner of the Chelsea football club, and [Oleg V. Deripaska](#), a powerful metals magnate.

Not all Russians are affected equally by the economic dislocation.

Those employed by the sprawling public sector and state-owned companies — who make up much of Mr. Putin’s political base — are relatively insulated, with their jobs likely to be secure. By contrast, middle-class Russians whose jobs and lives are tied closely to the world economy, and who are already more likely than the average Russian to oppose Mr. Putin, are under greater threat.

The risk for the West, some warned, is that the crushing sanctions could spark a backlash.

“The medicine could turn out to be worse than the illness, even from the point of view of declared goals,” Mr. Enikolopov said, arguing that the sanctions could end up entrenching anti-Western views. “No one is looking at the collateral damage at all.”

On the shore of western Russia’s Lake Valdai, Tatyana Makarova, an entrepreneur, said that she supported Mr. Putin’s war in Ukraine — and that the impact of the sanctions only shows that Russia has been excessively dependent on the West. Ms. Makarova, who owns a small cleaning company, said in a phone interview that she believed the economic crisis would finally force Russia to develop homegrown technology.

Ms. Makarova’s views are notable because [she had long campaigned](#) against Mr. Putin’s plutocracy by trying to stop illegal construction by members of the Kremlin elite on the Valdai lakefront, where Mr. Putin has a residence.

“Perhaps this will be good for us,” she said. “This will wake Russians up, and thank God.”

That is also the line being pushed by the pro-Kremlin media.

Komsomolskaya Pravda, the country’s most popular tabloid, published [an online poll](#) it said showed that Russians would not miss McDonald’s: “More than half of the respondents prefer homemade food to fast food,” the paper claimed.

Timofey Bordachev, a prominent political analyst, [wrote](#) that the new “Iron Curtain now descending between the West and Russia” offered the country “an absolutely fantastic chance to start a more meaningful and independent life.”

But not all Russians shared that optimism. Interviews with private sector workers across the country on Thursday revealed deep unease and showed that the economic crisis was already taking its toll on jobs and livelihoods.

Julia Andriyanova, 37, was laid off last weekend from her job as creative director at an independent advertising agency in Moscow that worked with global brands. When she went online to post her résumé, she noticed that creative-industry message boards were flooded with the newly unemployed. It feels like the economic crisis of early pandemic days, she said — except that now the outlook seems even worse.

“It looks like everyone is leaving now,” she said of the international brands. “And I have the feeling that it’s just the beginning.”

In the town of Tikhvin, east of St. Petersburg, Sergei Topygin, 23, has a decent salary and medical coverage as a line operator in a factory run by Ikea, the Swedish furniture giant. After Mr. Putin’s invasion

	<p>of Ukraine, Ikea suspended its operations in Russia, citing the “human tragedy” of the “devastating war in Ukraine.”</p> <p>Ikea promised the roughly 1,000 workers at its Tikhvin factory that their salaries would be paid at least until the end of March. But Mr. Toptygin fears losing his job.</p> <p>“Why would we need to fight a war?” Mr. Toptygin asked in a phone interview. “Everything was fine here.”</p> <p>In the Urals city of Yekaterinburg, Elena Lerman, a 36-year-old makeup artist, said she had seen the prices of some of the imported materials she uses double in recent weeks. She was opposed to the war, she said, but recognized that “we cannot physically influence the situation in Ukraine in any way at all.”</p> <p>Having gotten over the initial shock of the war, she said, she is focused on trying to keep her business going, trying to secure the materials she will need over the next eight to 12 months.</p> <p>“Life goes on,” she said. “What we can do is try to preserve ourselves and our loved ones, and somehow try to prolong our survival and our livelihood.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 US battles Russia, China disinformation
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/10/us/politics/russia-ukraine-china-bioweapons.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — One of Russia’s most incendiary disinformation campaigns ramped up days ago, when its defense and foreign ministries issued statements falsely claiming that the Pentagon was financing biological weapons labs in Ukraine.</p> <p>Then Chinese diplomats and state media organizations repeated the conspiracy theory at news conferences in Beijing, in articles and on official social media accounts.</p> <p>Now, the Biden White House has taken the extraordinary step of calling out both countries on their coordinated propaganda campaign and saying they might be providing cover for a potential biological or chemical weapons attack on Ukrainians by the Russian military.</p> <p>“Now that Russia has made these false claims, and China has seemingly endorsed this propaganda, we should all be on the lookout for Russia to possibly use chemical or biological weapons in Ukraine, or to create a false flag operation using them,” Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, wrote on Twitter on Wednesday evening. “It’s a clear pattern.”</p> <p>She called the accusations “preposterous,” and said the United States “does not develop or possess such weapons anywhere.” The State Department labeled the assertions “total nonsense” and said Ukraine has no biological weapons labs. Top American intelligence officials reiterated those points in a Senate hearing on Thursday.</p> <p>The Biden administration and its European and Asian allies find themselves fighting an information war against both Russia and China as President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia continues his military onslaught in Ukraine.</p> <p>The Chinese government’s promotion of Russian disinformation in the middle of the war has ignited concern among Western officials because of China’s powerful diplomatic standing and extensive cybercapabilities. Analysts who study disinformation from the two nations said this was the first time they had seen this scale of amplification between Beijing and Moscow around a conspiracy theory.</p> <p>“I can’t think of another active propaganda campaign by Russia that has gotten this level of boost from China,” said Bret Schafer, who tracks disinformation from China, Russia and Iran as a senior fellow for</p>

the [Alliance for Securing Democracy](#), a Washington nonprofit group. “I haven’t seen this volume around something like this.”

It is the latest display of the close alignment between Beijing and Moscow, which the two nations said had “no limits” in a 5,000-word statement issued when Mr. Putin met with President Xi Jinping of Beijing on Feb. 4. Around that time, senior Chinese officials [asked senior Russian officials](#) not to [invade Ukraine](#) before the end of the [Winter Olympics](#) in Beijing, according to a Western intelligence report.

Starting last November, American officials [quietly held talks](#) with Chinese officials, including the ambassador in Washington and the foreign minister, to discuss intelligence showing Mr. Putin’s troop buildup to persuade the Chinese to tell the Russians not to launch a war, but were rebuffed, U.S. officials said.

William J. Burns, the C.I.A. director, said Thursday in the Senate hearing that he believed Mr. Xi was “unsettled” by the Ukraine war and appeared to not have been told by his own intelligence services what would unfold.

Chinese officials have publicly sided with Russia throughout the war, denouncing the United States as the cause of the conflict and emphasizing Mr. Putin’s grievances about NATO enlargement, while also expressing concern over the humanitarian crisis. On Tuesday, Mr. Xi [repeated](#) China’s standard talking points on the war in a video call with the leaders of France and Germany, though he added that China was “deeply grieved by the outbreak of war again on the European continent,” according to a Chinese readout.

He did not say Russia had started the fighting.

Using news conferences, state media and the social media accounts of diplomats around the world, China has been trying to inflame the situation with fiery rhetoric and conspiracy theories rooted in Russian disinformation, say current and former U.S. officials and independent researchers. As Mr. Xi was talking to the European leaders on Tuesday, Zhao Lijian, a Foreign Ministry spokesman whom many Chinese citizens hail as a fiercely patriotic [“wolf warrior” diplomat](#), raised the issue of biochemical weapons in Ukraine [at a news conference](#) in Beijing, asserting that “Russia has found during its military operations that the U.S. uses these facilities to conduct bio-military plans.”

“It has 26 bio-labs and other related facilities in Ukraine, over which the U.S. Department of Defense has absolute control,” he said. “All dangerous pathogens in Ukraine must be stored in these labs and all research activities are led by the U.S. side.”

Mr. Zhao [has spread anti-U.S. conspiracy theories](#) to try to deflect criticism of China’s poor handling of the initial coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan and questions over the research of the Wuhan Institute of Virology. He said in March 2020 that the U.S. military might have brought the virus to Wuhan and asserted that research at Fort Detrick, Md., might have been at the root of the pandemic. He [mentioned](#) Fort Detrick again on Thursday.

Chinese diplomats, government agencies and state media organizations have used official accounts on Twitter and other social media platforms to spread the Ukraine labs conspiracy theory. A diplomat at the Chinese Embassy in Beirut, Cao Yi, even posted the theory on Twitter in both [Arabic](#) and [English](#).

The more than 235 Twitter posts have been split about evenly between Chinese state media accounts and diplomatic or government nonmedia accounts, Mr. Schafer said. There are many more posts on the lab theory on Chinese social media platforms.

Telesur, the Venezuelan state television network, has also amplified the lab theory from Russia, but that activity is minor compared with what China has been doing, Mr. Schafer said.

“Now that American tech platforms have taken action against Russian state media, the Chinese state media are filling the gap,” he said. “They’re mirroring Kremlin talking points.”

Variations of the lab conspiracy theory have been [circulated in recent weeks](#) by far-right American political figures and groups, including Tucker Carlson, the Fox News host; and QAnon acolytes. Glenn Greenwald, a journalist critical of American military power and security agencies, has said the theory [could be true](#). Even Ai Weiwei, the Chinese dissident artist, has [reposted](#) the theory on Twitter.

The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington think tank that tracks the Ukraine conflict, also [issued a warning on Wednesday](#) that the Russian statements could be part of an effort to lay the groundwork for Moscow's own chemical or biological attack. "Russia may conduct or fabricate such an attack and blame Ukraine and NATO to justify additional aggression against Ukraine," it said.

Chinese state media have repeated the entire range of official Russian statements on the Ukraine war, from the false assertion that Ukraine is full of neo-Nazis to arguments that the United States is an "empire of lies" pulling the puppet strings of Kyiv.

Global Times, a nationalistic newspaper published by the Communist Party, posted an [article](#) on Tuesday that said the U.S. government was trying to stir up anger against China over the Ukraine war by planting stories in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal and Voice of America. Other stories in Chinese state media accused Ukraine of using civilians as human shields, a Kremlin talking point, while avoiding any mention of civilian deaths at the hands of the Russian military.

Censors at Weibo and other Chinese social media companies have deleted pro-Ukraine posts on their platforms.

Mr. Xi and Mr. Putin [began promoting greater cooperation](#) between the media organizations of the two countries in 2015, and since then the two governments have held an annual media conference to try to ["redefine"](#) the map of the international discourse." Chinese media executives express admiration for RT and Sputnik, Russian state media organizations, for their ability to disseminate messages on a global scale.

The two nations were bound by a Communist ideology in the 1950s, but then split over politics and foreign policy. President Richard M. Nixon exploited that with a historic visit to Beijing in 1972 to normalize diplomatic relations with China. But in recent years, Mr. Xi and Mr. Putin have [strengthened their nations' ties](#), in large part driven by a shared perception of the United States as a threat and a desire to undermine American global dominance.

The Feb. 4 joint statement had a long section in which the two nations said they would lead the world in establishing true "democracy."

That drive to stand firm against the United States and Western Europe is showing up in both nations' propaganda and state media stories, said [Maria Repnikova](#), a professor of global communication at Georgia State University who studies China and Russia.

"There's a strong undercurrent of anti-Western sentiment and disposition in a lot of these narratives," she said. "They're questioning U.S. legitimacy, including by using these conspiracy theories."

On the Ukraine war, she added, there is a "convergence of Russian and Chinese propaganda about who is to blame, about the roots of the conflict."

But some Russian news stories and commentary on Thursday questioned China's commitment to Russia after news agencies reported that China [was refusing to send aircraft parts](#) to the country, Ms. Repnikova said. Boeing and Airbus cut ties to Russian airlines after the Biden administration and the European Union [imposed sanctions](#).

Large Chinese companies will likely comply with sanctions to avoid jeopardizing their global commerce. For China, Europe and the United States are much larger trade partners than Russia.

HEADLINE	03/10 Parents young children bewildered?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/10/health/covid-vaccines-children.html
GIST	<p>For American parents, particularly those with young children, the last couple of months have been dizzying and beyond frustrating.</p> <p>In early February, federal regulators announced that they would evaluate Pfizer-BioNTech's coronavirus vaccine for the youngest children — only to scrap that plan 10 days later, citing doubts about the vaccine's effectiveness in that age group.</p> <p>Soon after, scientists reported that the vaccine was only weakly protective against infection with the Omicron variant among children aged 5 to 11 and that it appeared to offer little defense against moderate Covid illness among adolescents aged 12 to 17.</p> <p>On Monday, citing these data, Florida's surgeon general declared that healthy children need not be immunized, advice that Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, called “deeply disturbing.”</p> <p>Through it all, experts have continued to endorse vaccines, noting that while the Omicron variant may be able to penetrate immune defenses and infect people, the vaccines still prevent severe illness and death — and may do so for years.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that record numbers of children under 5 had been hospitalized during the Omicron surge, underscoring the need for vaccines for those children. But the agency has since said that 90 percent of Americans can safely stop wearing masks in public indoor spaces, even in schools with young children.</p> <p>Who could blame parents for feeling bewildered?</p> <p>“The part that's confusing is like there's no longer any clear, right answer,” said Anne Gonzalez, a 41-year-old mother of two who manages volunteers for a large religious nonprofit in St. Louis. “I've come to the point that all I can do is what I think is right for my family.”</p> <p>Fortunately, the coming weeks should bring some clarity. Both Pfizer and Moderna plan to report results from trials of their vaccines in young children. The results, if positive, should lead to a new round of regulatory review, perhaps as early as April, that may well allow vaccinations for tens of millions of youngsters.</p> <p>But those findings will arrive as the Omicron variant fades in the United States, complicating parental decisions about whether to vaccinate children.</p> <p>Fewer than one in four children aged 5 to 11 are now fully vaccinated. More than half of adolescents 12 to 17 are fully vaccinated, but only about 12 percent have received a booster dose. Those percentages are even lower in rural areas of the United States.</p> <p>Children are less likely to experience illness, so the balance of risk and benefit was never the same as for adults. And by now, as much as 95 percent of the country has some degree of protection from the virus because of vaccines or prior infection, according to recent data from the C.D.C.</p> <p>Experts worry that the most recent findings have made it even more challenging to persuade some parents to immunize their children.</p> <p>“We should be disappointed with the data — we wish it could be better,” said Luciana Borio, a former acting chief scientist at the Food and Drug Administration. “But in the near term, it's important for parents to still vaccinate children.”</p>

The country may still see a surge in the fall or winter, and the best protection for children will be to have had at least two shots before then, she said.

The vaccines are continuing to prevent severe disease and death, even with the Omicron variant. That trend is particularly clear at hospitals, said Dr. James Campbell, a physician at the University of Maryland School of Medicine and a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics committee on infectious diseases.

Among his pediatric patients who were sick enough to need a mechanical ventilator or die, “every single one of them was unvaccinated,” Dr. Campbell said.

A Dosing Conundrum

The recent studies suggest that the problem is not so much the vaccine as the dose.

In the trials in adults in 2020, vaccine manufacturers made best guesses at the right dose and opted for short intervals between the shots to protect people as quickly as possible during the initial surge.

The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines proved to be safe and powerfully protective in clinical trials and were speedily authorized for use. But the trials in children were complicated by the arrival of the Delta and Omicron variants, and the vaccine appeared to be less protective in children aged 2 to 4.

At the moment, the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is the only one authorized for children. (The vaccines made by Moderna and Johnson & Johnson are authorized only for adults.)

In the Pfizer trials, adolescents aged 12 to 17 were given 30 micrograms, the same dose given to adults. But children aged 5 to 11 received 10 micrograms, and those 6 months to 5 years old received just three micrograms.

These doses may have been too low to rouse an adequate and lasting response. But federal officials who have seen the data told The New York Times that higher doses produced too many fevers in children.

What to do when you can’t administer a dose high enough to shield children against the Omicron variant because of side effects? That’s the problem that scientists and federal officials are now wrestling with.

Pfizer and BioNTech are now testing a third dose in children under 12 to determine whether it can deliver the level of protection that two doses could not. The F.D.A. is still evaluating the Moderna vaccine for use in children 6 to 11. Last week, the agency [rejected an application](#) for authorization of the Indian-made vaccine Covaxin for children.

There are other Covid vaccines, like those made by Novavax and Sanofi, that may turn out to work well in children. Federal health officials should consider all of these options and test whether a different dose or a longer interval between doses would improve the immune response, experts said.

“It seems to me that vaccines for children are taking longer than they should, given the importance of protecting that population,” Dr. Borio said. “The sooner we re-energize our search for safe and effective vaccines for children, the better off we’ll be.”

Masks in Schools

The disappointing findings, along with the receding Omicron surge, have greatly complicated policy decisions for local health officials.

Countering Florida’s recommendations, Louisiana and California will require schoolchildren to be immunized by fall 2022, and the District of Columbia set a deadline of March 1 for students 12 and older to be fully vaccinated.

Other states may adopt similar policies but are likely to do so only if the F.D.A. grants the vaccine full approval for use in schoolchildren, said Hemi Tewarson, executive director at the National Academy for State Health Policy, a nonpartisan organization.

“For a lot of them, that’s going to be key for requiring vaccines as a mandate,” she said.

A school vaccine mandate would ease the fears of many families with children who have medical vulnerabilities.

Nearly every member of Heather Kever’s family, including her son, Wesley, 14, has heart disease, high blood pressure and kidney disease. But because they are not technically immunocompromised, they have not qualified for accommodations at work or at school, said Ms. Kever, 42, a consultant in suburban Chicago.

“They forget that there’s some of us who just literally can’t take the mask off,” at least until the rates fall much further, she said. “I felt like I didn’t matter and I wasn’t important and I was arguably disposable. And I still do.”

Some scientists, too, have said they would continue to wear masks until the numbers dip because of the risk of infection.

Because the youngest children have not yet been vaccinated, “I’d be very hesitant to ask a child below 5 to remove masks indoors,” said Akiko Iwasaki, an immunologist at Yale University who studies long Covid, the cluster of symptoms that can persist long after the acute infection is resolved.

Given the muddled results on the effectiveness of vaccines and the mixed messages on the benefits of masks, families are weighing risks on their own — and coming to very different conclusions.

Jennifer Steinberg, a management consultant in Wilmington, Del., has two daughters who split their time with her and their immunocompromised father.

“Yes, great, it protects against severe illness,” Ms. Steinberg said of the vaccine. “But if your kids are still going to get infected, this is a huge disruption to family lives. I’m probably going to stay masked for the foreseeable future.”

Katie Sunderland of Arlington, Va., has long been ready to give up masks. If her children, 7 and 5, do become infected, “that’s a trade-off I’m OK with if they are able to unmask and see faces,” she said.

“I’m not convinced that wearing a mask would significantly reduce the risk of getting Covid anyway — especially not the type of masks I see most kids wearing,” Ms. Sunderland, 37, said. “It doesn’t make sense to me to impede my kids’ development for that very, very, very low risk.”

But many other parents are still unsure of what to do. Ms. Gonzalez has a niece and nephew who have congenital heart defects and problems with lung capacity, and she will continue to wear masks to protect them, she said.

But if her son’s school drops the mask requirement, “we don’t know what we’re going to do yet.”

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HEADLINE	03/10 Extend federal public health emergency?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/10/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine#governors-federal-public-health-emergency
GIST	Thirteen Democratic state governors wrote to Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra this week, urging him to extend the country’s public health emergency declaration for at least another three months beyond its scheduled expiration in April.

The governors said Tuesday that they need much more time to prepare before the emergency ends. Their states have been providing a number of services and benefits during the pandemic that rely on federal resources, and those things “will take significant time to thoughtfully ramp down, phase out, or, in some cases, extend permanently,” the letter says.

The benefits include support for expanded telehealth access, extra food aid for low-income families and other programs. The declaration has also given the states more flexibility to take measures such as allowing hospitals and clinics to set up alternate treatment sites and allowing Medicaid recipients to remain enrolled without redetermining their eligibility.

The Health and Human Services Department [has promised to warn states](#) 60 days before making any change to the declaration. The governors asked in their letter for the notice period to be increased to 90 days.

Federal [public health emergency declarations](#) initially last 90 days, and can be extended for further 90-day periods. Mr. Becerra and his predecessor, Alex M. Azar II, have extended the pandemic declaration eight times since January 2020, when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [confirmed the country’s first coronavirus case](#).

The most recent extension took effect Jan. 16 and lasts until April 16. Since that date is less than 60 days away, and the administration has not sent any notice to the contrary, it seems likely that another extension is in the cards.

Kirsten Allen, the press secretary for Health and Human Services, said on Wednesday that, “consistent with our commitment since the beginning of this administration,” the department “will provide states with 60 days’ notice prior to any possible termination or expiration in the future.”

The letter to Secretary Becerra was signed by the governors of the three West Coast states (California, Oregon and Washington); three in the Mountain West (Colorado, New Mexico and Nevada); four in the Midwest (Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin); two on the East Coast (Delaware and Rhode Island); and Hawaii.

It contrasts with a recent plea by Republican representatives in Congress, who [urged the Biden administration in mid-February to end the declaration](#), citing widening public access to vaccines and treatments as well as the social costs of extending Covid-19-related restrictions.

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HEADLINE	03/10 Surging inflation; war pushes up prices
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/10/business/economy/cpi-inflation-february-2022.html
GIST	<p>Prices climbed at the fastest pace in decades in the month leading up to the war in Ukraine, underlining the high stakes facing the United States — along with many developed economies — as the conflict promises to drive costs higher.</p> <p>The Consumer Price Index rose by 7.9 percent through February, the fastest pace of annual inflation in 40 years. Rising food and rent costs contributed to the big increase, the Bureau of Labor Statistics said, as did a nascent surge in gas prices that will become more pronounced in the March inflation report.</p> <p>The February report caught only the start of the surge in gas prices that came in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine late last month. Economists expect inflation to pick up even more in March because prices at the pump have since jumped to record-breaking highs. The average price for a gallon of gas was \$4.32 on Thursday, according to AAA.</p> <p>Rapidly climbing costs are hitting consumers in the pocketbook, causing confidence to fall and stretching household budgets. Rising wages and savings amassed during the pandemic have helped many families</p>

continue spending despite rising prices, but the burden is falling most intensely on lower-income households, which devote a big chunk of their budgets to daily necessities that are now swiftly becoming more expensive.

The price burst presents a challenge for President Biden, especially given that November's midterm elections are fast approaching. Democrats will need to battle to retain control of Congress at a time when voters are feeling the squeeze of higher expenses. On Thursday, Mr. Biden acknowledged the pain consumers are feeling from rapid inflation but pointed a finger at President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, blaming his invasion of Ukraine for fueling higher gas prices. Democrats tweeted about the report on Thursday using the hashtag #PutinPriceHike.

"Today's inflation report is a reminder that Americans' budgets are being stretched by price increases and families are starting to feel the impacts of Putin's price hike," Mr. Biden said in a statement. "As I have said from the start, there will be costs at home as we impose crippling sanctions in response to Putin's unprovoked war, but Americans can know this: The costs we are imposing on Putin and his cronies are far more devastating than the costs we are facing."

The Ukraine invasion is poised to compound a stubborn inflation problem. Cost increases had been running fast for a year and accelerating for months, posing a problem for the Federal Reserve, which is in charge of achieving price stability. The central bank has [signaled it will raise interest rates](#) by a quarter percentage point at its meeting next week, probably the first in a series of moves meant to increase the cost of borrowing and spending money and slow down the economy. By reducing consumption and slowing the labor market, the Fed is able to take some pressure off inflation over time.

Broadening price pressures and high gas costs could become a serious issue for central bank policymakers if they help convince consumers that the run-up in prices will last. If people begin expecting inflation, they may change their behavior in ways that make it more permanent: accepting price increases more readily, and asking for bigger raises to keep up.

"It was another bad report," said Laura Rosner-Warburton, senior economist at MacroPolicy Perspectives. "Inflation was already way too high before the invasion of Ukraine."

While the February report caught only a few days of post-invasion gas prices, the increase in fuel accounted for about a third of the price index increase, the government said. Omair Sharif, founder of Inflation Insights, said he expected inflation to pick up to 8.3 percent in March as pump prices surge.

Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen on Thursday predicted more inflation ahead as a result of Russia's invasion and the [economic sanctions](#) Western countries have placed on Mr. Putin's regime.

"We've seen a very meaningful increase in gas prices," Ms. Yellen said on CNBC. "And my guess is that next month we'll see a further evidence of an impact on U.S. inflation of Putin's war on Ukraine."

The gas shock is just the latest instance in which what can go wrong seems to be going wrong when it comes to prices.

Fast inflation began to kick in early last year, and many forecasters initially predicted that it would fade by the end of 2021 as the economy reopened from the pandemic and conditions returned to normal.

Instead, turmoil in supply chains collided with strong consumer demand for goods, and price gains accelerated. Now, it is hard to guess how quickly and how much prices will moderate in 2022 as conflict abroad threatens to [keep shipping routes tangled](#) and parts scarce. Ukraine is an important [producer of neon](#), which could keep computer chips in short supply, perpetuating the shortages that have plagued automakers. Higher energy costs could ricochet through other industries.

Even without further supply chain troubles, there are signs that inflation is widening beyond a few pandemic-affected sectors, an indication that they could last as the latest virus surge fades from view. Rent

of primary residences, for instance, climbed by 0.6 percent from the prior month — the [fastest monthly pace](#) of growth since 1999.

Price gains have been rapid around much of the world, causing many central banks to scale back how much help they are providing to their economies. The [European Central Bank](#) on Thursday decided to speed up its exit from its bond-buying program as it tries to counter rising inflation. Europe's push to end its energy dependence on Russia promises to raise costs at a time when inflation is already nearly triple the central bank's target.

In the United States, there are still reasons to think price gains will slow this year. Beginning in March, the data will be compared to relatively high readings from last year, which should mechanically start to bring down the year-over-year measure. But it is unclear when inflation will recede to the Fed's 2 percent inflation goal. The central bank defines that target using [a separate inflation index](#), but one that is also up considerably.

Rapid price increases have caused some people to adjust their lifestyles. Timothy Gutbrod, who formerly worked as a stage actor, has been a driving instructor in Albany, N.Y., since March 2020, and the job pays him a little more than \$30,000 per year. As higher gas prices have made his commute and everyday purchases more expensive, he has eaten out less.

For someone who was a longtime Manhattanite, that's a real loss, Mr. Gutbrod, 61, said. He used to enjoy three restaurant brunches or dinners each week. Now it's more like one every two weeks.

"I used to go on relaxing drives," he said, but now joy rides are unaffordable. "I'm on a shoestring budget, and I work pretty hard. For anyone who doesn't make a lot of money, you have to be intelligent and start cutting corners."

As it disturbs everyday lives, inflation is likely to dog Democrats and the administration as they fight to retain control of Congress in November. Despite plentiful jobs and quickly rising wages, consumer confidence has fallen to its [lowest level since the summer of 2011](#), when the economy was clambering back from the global financial crisis and Congress was bickering over lifting the nation's debt ceiling.

That probably at least partly reflects the reality that pay is not quite keeping up with inflation for the [typical worker](#), and that consumers are paying more at the pump, which tends to be a very salient cost for Americans.

In February, the cost of food rose, which is also difficult for consumers on tight budgets. Over the past year, grocery prices have increased by 8.6 percent, the largest yearly jump since the period ending in April 1981. Fresh fruit and dairy products became notably more expensive last month.

The White House has emphasized that it is trying to offset rising costs to the degree that it can.

"We've taken steps to address bottlenecks in the supply chain, to reduce those bottlenecks," Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, said this week.

But those changes have mostly helped around the edges, and as prices have shown little sign of moderating on their own, Fed officials have coalesced around the view that they will need to use their policies to cool off demand and keep today's rapid inflation from becoming entrenched. That may limit the central bank's room to react to any slowdown in growth prompted by uncertainty and high gas prices.

"They need to stay on track," said Ms. Rosner-Warburton. "They don't have as much leeway to respond to these risks, given how elevated inflation is."

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SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/tiny-fraction-of-us-missed-in-census-higher-for-minorities/
GIST	<p>Black, Hispanic and American Indian residents were missed at higher rates than a decade ago during the 2020 census, according to a report released Thursday that evaluated how well the once-a-decade head count tallied every U.S. resident.</p> <p>Even though the 2020 census missed an unexpectedly small percentage of the total U.S. population given the unprecedented challenges it faced, the increase in undercounts among some minority groups prompted an outcry from civil rights leaders who blamed political interference by the Trump administration, which tried unsuccessfully to add a citizenship question to the census form and cut field operations short.</p> <p>“These numbers are devastating. Once again, we see an overcount of white Americans and an undercount of Black and Hispanic Americans,” National Urban League CEO Marc Morial said on a call with reporters. “I want to express in the strongest possible terms our outrage.”</p> <p>The results of U.S. Census Bureau’s Post-Enumeration Survey showed that most racial and ethnic minorities were overlooked at statistically significant higher rates than a decade ago, with the Asian population being an exception. The survey measures whether certain populations were undercounted or overrepresented in the census. Overcounts take place, for example, if someone owns a vacation home and is counted there as well as at a permanent home address.</p> <p>The Black population in the 2020 census had a net undercount of 3.3%, while it was almost 5% for Hispanics and 5.6% for American Indians and Native Alaskans living on reservations. Those identifying as some other race had a net undercount of 4.3%. The non-Hispanic white population had a net overcount of 1.6%, and Asians had a net overcount of 2.6%, according to the results.</p> <p>In the 2010 census, by comparison, the Black population had a net undercount of more than 2%, while it was 1.5% for the Hispanic population. There was almost a 4.9% undercount for American Indian and Alaskan Natives living on reservations, and it was 1.6% for people identifying as some other race and 0.08% for Asians. The non-Hispanic white population had a net overcount of 0.8%.</p> <p>The 2020 census missed 0.24% of the entire U.S. population, a rate that wasn’t statistically significant, while it missed 0.01% in the 2010 census.</p> <p>The census figures help determine the distribution of \$1.5 trillion in federal spending each year as well as how many congressional seats each state gets. Any undercounts in various populations can shortchange the amount of funding and political representation they get over the next decade.</p> <p>In the years leading up to the 2020 census, advocates worried that a failed attempt by the Trump administration to add a citizenship question to the census questionnaire would scare off Hispanics and immigrants from participating, whether they were in the country legally or not. The Trump administration also unsuccessfully tried to get the Census Bureau to to exclude people in the country illegally from numbers used for divvying up congressional seats among the states and cut short the schedule for field operations that had been extended because of the pandemic.</p> <p>During a conference call Thursday, Census Bureau Director Robert Santos said many Latino communities throughout the U.S. suffered during the pandemic from joblessness and housing insecurity, and that played a role in the undercount. But he added that the Trump administration’s actions also may have had an impact.</p> <p>“I’m personally not surprised to see the results we see today,” said Santos, who was sworn into the position at the beginning of the year.</p> <p>The severe undercount of the Hispanic population helps explain why three states with large Latino populations underperformed in the 2020 census, with Arizona failing to gain an extra seat, Florida</p>

gaining only a single seat and Texas getting only two seats, said Arturo Vargas, CEO of NALEO Educational Fund.

“It was startling to me, the level of undercount,” Vargas said. “We knew there was going to be an undercount, but the extent of it took me by surprise.”

About 70% of Native Americans live on reservations. James Tucker, the chairman of a Census Bureau advisory committee, estimated the undercount translates to at least 100,000 Native Americans on reservations not counted and more than a \$300 million loss in federal funding for Indian Country annually.

“This undercount is not new — it is a continuous cycle of erasure of Native people from society,” said Lycia Maddocks, a citizen of the Fort Yuma Quechan Indian Tribe in Arizona who is political director of NDN Collective, a South Dakota-based advocacy group. “In a practical sense, an undercount means that Native people are not looked at as a significant voting block when in reality, our population has proven itself to be the margin of victory in key states such as Arizona.”

The pandemic disrupted census operations and schedules, and it made residents wary of opening their doors to answer questions from census takers. Wildfires in the West and hurricanes in the Gulf Coast during the door-knocking phase of the head count sent residents fleeing from their homes.

The Post-Enumeration showed that 18.8 million people weren’t counted correctly in the 2020 census. Although some of them may have been missed, others were counted using a statistical technique that fills in missing data.

After the results of the Post-Enumeration Survey were released, dozens of members of the Congressional Black Caucus sent a letter to the Census Bureau asking how it planned to investigate the undercount.

“A Census that does not accurately represent Black communities robs them of their equal share of federal resources in education, health care, housing, nutrition assistance, and many other areas — perpetuating systemic racism,” the letter said.

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HEADLINE	03/10 Tacoma mayor delivers state of city address
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/state-of-the-city-address-tacoma-mayor-victoria-woodards/281-0d46b855-c429-421d-b3f1-7a0913b5ea0f
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. — Tacoma Mayor Victoria Woodards touched on public safety, pandemic recovery, homelessness and housing in her 2022 State of the City address Thursday night.</p> <p>In the first portion of her address, Woodards acknowledged rising crime within the city.</p> <p>Homicides remained the same year over year, with 31 both in 2020 and 2021. However, the city saw a 15% increase in vandalism and property destruction, a nearly 20% increase in assaults, a 66% increase in motor vehicle theft and an 85% increase in arson, according to city data.</p> <p>"We know that everyone is feeling the effects of these crimes," Woodards said.</p> <p>Woodards also drew attention to the current vacancies at the Tacoma Police Department, with 50 jobs open out of 364 positions. The current vacancy rate at the department sits at 14%, while the city normally averages a 4% vacancy rate.</p> <p>"When it comes to this issue, the state of our city is unacceptable," Woodards said.</p>

Woodards said the new Tacoma Police Chief Avery Moore is actively working on recruiting more officers and the city council approved \$25,000 hiring bonuses for qualified lateral officers in order to compete with other cities whose departments are also understaffed.

"We cannot keep our community safe without police," Woodard said. "They are part of the solution."

Woodards also referenced a program intended to help shoulder the impacts vandalism and crime are having on businesses, including funds for temporary private security enhancements and a window replacement fund.

However, local business owners have previously urged the city and police department to do more to address crime, saying the fund itself is not enough to mitigate the negative impacts of crime on their businesses.

The mayor also announced a new program, Tacoma's Police-Community Reconciliation. Funded by a grant from Microsoft, the program involves an acknowledgment from the city of past and present harm and "specific and concrete acts of repair."

Woodards touched on homelessness and affordable housing in her speech, saying the city must "do more" to address the homelessness crisis. The mayor said 57 units of permanent supportive housing are slated for construction and more than 480 permanent supportive housing units were provided funding for construction and are slated to be completed in the next two years.

The city is close to doubling its shelter capacity, and implementing a program to train more qualified shelter staff, which has limited the amount of shelter available in the past, Woodards said.

The mayor confirmed the city purchased a former Comfort Inn, which will be turned into 120 units of emergency housing and transitioned into permanent supportive housing after a period of two years.

In her speech, Woodards also touched on COVID-19 pandemic recovery.

Woodards said the city will continue to focus on investments in alternative career pathways, like the Healthcare Apprenticeship Pilot program, which pairs residents in Tacoma Housing Authority accommodations with training and apprenticeship options, including wrap-around services and a cash stipend.

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HEADLINE	03/10 UW cherry blossoms peak bloom mid-Mar.
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/cherry-blossoms-peak-bloom-march/281-19b74a9c-18bf-4312-b7a6-0038bba33c74
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Wondering when the best time is to go check out Seattle's famed cherry blossoms? The answer is soon!</p> <p>The University of Washington's iconic cherry blossoms, situated in the campus' Quad, are expected to be in peak bloom in mid-March.</p> <p>According to a release from the school, the 29 trees usually reach peak bloom in the third week of March. Sara Shores, an arborist at UW, said the trees are on track to hit that timing.</p> <p>Peak blossom is defined as the point when at least 70% of the blossoms have emerged. These blossoms can stay on the trees for more extended periods of time with cooler temperatures, drier weather and lighter winds.</p>

	<p>UW isn't the only place to get your cherry blossom fix. These trees, as well as plum trees, can be found throughout Seattle, according to the university. These are usually visible from early February until as late as May.</p> <p>Keep an eye out for trees whose petals range in color from white to light rose to even dark pink. Also, cherry trees have patterns of lines running horizontally on their bark. These are called lenticels and help the tree "exhale" and release carbon dioxide and water.</p> <p>Plum trees, while they can be mistaken for cherry trees, don't have these lenticels and typically bloom earlier in the year.</p> <p>The blossoms at UW usually draw large crowds to campus, and while masks are not required, UW is asking everyone to be respectful if some community members decide to wear one.</p> <p>The school asks anyone who visits to not climb on the trees or shake the branches to protect the blossoms. Those who don't want to visit the campus can check out UW's live webcam overlooking the Quad.</p> <p>Over the last two years, UW has encouraged the public to view the blossoms virtually to limit the spread of COVID-19.</p> <p>If you're looking to explore outside UW, the city's Department of Transportation keeps a map on its website of all the trees across Seattle. Just search for trees with the "Prunus" genus, according to UW, which denotes cherry and plum trees.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 WA to gain over 100min. daylight in March
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/weather/weather-blog/washington-state-daylight-gain-march/281-2ba96ea3-159d-4145-a609-e7f11343e1ac
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Spring has almost sprung in western Washington.</p> <p>While the official start of spring doesn't officially arrive until the equinox on March 20, days are beginning to get noticeably longer. And there's a reason why.</p> <p>We gain the most daylight in March than any other month, and it's not because we "spring forward" for daylight saving time.</p> <p>The fastest change in daylight occurs around the spring and fall equinoxes - gaining the most daylight in March and losing the most in September.</p> <p>During March, Washington gains somewhere between 3-4 minutes of sunlight each day. This adds up to over 100 minutes of daylight gained during the month for the Seattle area and for most of the state.</p> <p>The longer days make sense if you think about the solstices. We slowly started gaining more daylight in December on the winter solstice, a few seconds a day, but the amount gained accelerates through January, February and March. The opposite happens on the summer solstice – we start losing daylight each day.</p> <p>To do that, the rate of change of daylight goes to zero at the solstices as the amount of daylight switches "directions."</p> <p>The daily change is much less significant as you go further south. The southern edge of Florida and Texas only gain about 40 minutes of daylight in March.</p> <p>Even farther south, Honolulu only gains a little over a minute of daylight a day. Their total sunlight gain for the month is only 36 minutes.</p>

	<p>As dramatic as the change is in the Pacific Northwest, it is even greater farther towards the poles. Fairbanks, Alaska is currently gaining almost 7 minutes of daylight each day and is on its way to having 21 hours and 40 minutes of daylight at the summer solstice. That is a huge change from the darkness of the winter solstice with only 3 hours and 41 minutes of daylight.</p> <p>Of course, the most noticeable change will be Sunday, March 13, 2022, when we “spring forward” for daylight saving time. Sunset on Sunday will be after 7 p.m. But if you’re an early riser, you’ll miss that hour of daylight Sunday morning when the sun won’t rise until almost 7:30 a.m.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Seattle to clear another encampment
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/city-seattle-clear-another-encampment-friday/PYLJETW6VREJREBWAUNKX5LH6I/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The city of Seattle is planning to clear another homeless encampment on Friday.</p> <p>The encampment is located in the area of Pike and Pine streets between Fourth and Fifth avenues.</p> <p>A notice was posted by the city and it orders the people living there to have their belongings moved by 9 a.m.</p> <p>Any items picked up by the city will be kept in storage for 70 days at no charge.</p> <p>The city is also offering housing assistance to anyone living in the area.</p> <p>On Wednesday, the city cleared an encampment across City Hall after an attempt last month was unsuccessful.</p> <p>The encampment, located on 4th Avenue between James Street and Columbia Street, had 30 tents at one point.</p> <p>Seattle officers assisted by sealing off several blocks of 4th Avenue around 8 a.m. so crews could take down tents and clear debris from the street.</p> <p>The mayor’s office told KIRO 7 that outreach workers with the city’s HOPE Team had visited the area multiple times, resulting in at least 15 referrals to shelters and tiny houses since Feb. 17.</p> <p>Homeless camps across downtown Seattle are getting cleared out as part of the city’s new tactic to address homelessness.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Germany posts a one day record in cases
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/10/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine#germany-posts-a-one-day-record-in-cases-even-as-it-plans-to-lift-restrictions
GIST	<p>Germany reported a record number of new coronavirus cases on Wednesday — the first time the authorities there said they had registered more than a quarter-million new daily cases — the same day that Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s cabinet discussed plans to drop most masking and social distancing rules and vaccine requirements when the law covering such measures expires this month.</p> <p>The contrast reflects the nature of the Omicron variant, which is behind the current coronavirus wave in Germany, and which studies have shown more often results in mild illness than earlier variants.</p> <p>In dropping its Covid restrictions while also living through some of its largest case numbers, Germany is following a similar playbook to that of other European nations that have dropped or plan to drop most rules despite high caseloads.</p>

	<p>“I still have hope that we can control the increase,” Karl Lauterbach, the country’s health minister, said in Berlin on Wednesday as he presented the cabinet’s plan to abandon most Covid-related restrictions.</p> <p>Experts says that Germany’s second peak in an Omicron-variant-driven wave is due to both the spread of BA.2, a subvariant of Omicron that scientists believe is even more contagious, and the loosening of vigorous social distancing rules.</p> <p>The country’s health authorities recorded 262,752 new cases on Wednesday. In the past week, Germany reported an average of more than 200,000 cases per day, a 22 percent increase from the average two weeks ago, according to the Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University.</p> <p>Because of the relative mildness of the Omicron variant pathology — the number of Covid patients in the country’s intensive-care units has fallen more than half since December — and a belief that the wave would peak in February, the German authorities had agreed last month on a three-step phasing out of most social distancing practices.</p> <p>When the final phase begins, on March 20, most aspects of life will return to some form of normal. Some exceptions include a mask requirement on public transit and rules around testing or masks for contact with vulnerable people, such as in nursing homes and hospitals.</p> <p>The law will allow Germany’s states to reimpose rules if the medical system is threatened by future outbreaks.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Some dread return to workplace culture
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/10/business/remote-work-office-life.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article
GIST	<p>Kristen Egziabher was all jitters just before the pandemic, awaiting news of a possible raise, until her manager came back dejected from his meeting with the higher-ups.</p> <p>“I was presenting the case for you,” he told her. “And people were like, ‘We don’t really know Kristen. We only know her work.’”</p> <p>What?</p> <p>Sure, her work. What else could be relevant to a performance review? But this was exactly what had always irked Ms. Egziabher, 40, about her office, where she served as a project manager for a Texas food chain. No matter her productivity, her colleagues seemed to care primarily about the chitchat — what’d you do last weekend, where’d you get that purse? Ms. Egziabher, who is Black, felt that her white co-workers were fixated on who was jostling for entry to their in-group.</p> <p>“What does all that matter for my pay?” she wondered. “If we’re being real, I don’t care what you did last weekend.”</p> <p>Remote work brought a reprieve. Several months into being sent to work from home, Ms. Egziabher got a promotion and an 11 percent raise: “If I had continued going into the office,” she added, “there might have been some excuse around likability.”</p> <p>When one of America’s earliest open-plan offices debuted in Racine, Wis., in 1939, women made up less than one-third of the country’s labor force. The design of that early office, not so different from the one that modern workers experience, fit the needs of a particular employee: someone who could stay late because he didn’t have to rush home to make dinner for his children; someone pleased to cross paths with the boss because it meant time to talk golf.</p>

The office, in other words, was never one size fits all. It was one size fits some, with the expectation that everybody else would squeeze in. Office banter, for example, might have been a small annoyance for a segment of workers. But for many others, it amplified a sense that they didn't belong.

The last two years ushered in an unplanned experiment with a different way of working: Some 50 million Americans left their offices. Before the pandemic, in 2019, about 4 percent of employed people in the U.S. worked exclusively from home; by May 2020, that figure rose to 43 percent, according to Gallup. Of course, that means a majority of the work force continued working in person throughout the last two years. But among white-collar workers, the shift is stark: Before Covid just 6 percent worked exclusively from home, which by May 2020 rose to 65 percent.

"The only thing holding back flexible work arrangements was a failure of imagination," said Joan Williams, director of the Center for WorkLife Law at the University of California, Hastings. "That failure was remedied in three weeks' time in March 2020."

But now some executives are throwing open their office doors, propelled by loosening Covid restrictions and declining cases. Office occupancy across the country reached a pandemic peak of 40 percent in December, dipped because of the Omicron variant and then began to rise again, reaching 38 percent this month, according to data from the security firm Kastle. Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan Chase, American Express, Meta, Microsoft, Ford Motor and Citigroup are just a handful of the companies starting to bring some workers back.

When over 700 people responded to The Times' recent questions about returning to their offices, as well as in interviews with more than two dozen of them, there were myriad reasons people listed for preferring work from home, on top of concerns about Covid safety. They mentioned sunlight, sweatpants, quality time with kids, quality time with cats, more hours to read and run, space to hide the angst of a crummy day or year. But the most strongly argued was about workplace culture.

"There's not much point in returning to the office if we're just going back to the old boys' club," said Keren Gifford, 37, an information technology worker in Pittsburgh who has not yet been required to return to her office. "What a relief not to have to go in day after day, week after week, and fail at making friends and having fun."

Many, like Ms. Gifford, realized they felt like they'd spent their careers in spaces built for somebody else. Take something as simple as temperature. Most building thermostats follow a model developed in the 1960s that takes into account, among other factors, the resting metabolic rate of a 40-year-old man weighing 154 pounds, according to a study published in Nature Climate Change. That left women to spend their prepandemic years filling cubicles with shawls, space heaters and blankets they could burrow into "like a burrito."

Some even kept their desks stocked with fingerless gloves, like Marissa Stein, 37, a staffer at an environmental nonprofit. Once Ms. Stein started working remotely, she could set her home temperature to 68 degrees, a compromise between her husband's chillier preferences and her own.

"Sometimes I will sneak it up to 70 when my husband isn't paying attention," she said.

But that's just the smallest example of how the office was physically designed to fit the needs of a very specific type of worker.

And some of the companies now attempting to call their staff back are facing a wave of resistance from workers emboldened to question the way things always were — which is to say, difficult for many people. There are people of color whose colleagues wouldn't stop asking them how to work the copy machine. There are the introverts who never wanted to chat about fantasy football leagues. There are the caretakers who used to rush out for school pickup, feeling they were failing to meet unspoken professional expectations and just barely meeting their families' needs.

Two national surveys found that since the onset of the pandemic there's been a reduction in the percentage of employees who say that working long hours or being available beyond business hours is important to be successful at their organizations, according to Youngjoo Cha, a sociologist at Indiana University.

"We had a nationwide experiment in telecommuting," Ms. Cha said. "These conditions challenged the notion of ideal workers."

Studies of 10,000 office workers conducted last year by Future Forum, a research group backed by Slack, suggest that women and people of color were more likely to see working remote as beneficial than their white male colleagues. In the United States, 86 percent of Hispanic and 81 percent of Black knowledge workers, those who do nonmanual work, said that they preferred hybrid or remote work, compared with 75 percent of white knowledge workers. And globally, 50 percent of working mothers who participated in the studies reported wanting to work remotely most or all the time, compared with 43 percent of fathers. A sense of belonging at work increased for 24 percent of Black knowledge workers surveyed, compared with 5 percent of white knowledge workers, since May 2021.

Of course, some miss the work-life boundaries that their pre-Covid lives enabled: "My husband will sometimes come home and turn on the T.V., and I'm like, you turned on the T.V. in my office!" said Barbara Harris, 49, who works in professional services in Virginia.

Others, especially managers, argue that culture building is tougher to do virtually — does anybody really want another Zoom trivia night? Some people wrote to The Times to mourn their bonding conversations with teammates over Dungeons & Dragons, Nintendo and Marvel, or simply to say that remote work can get lonely: "I feel a little bit depressed when I wake up at 8 a.m., go to my coffee table, sit there at my computer on zoom from 9:00 to 5:00, and then just close my computer and haven't left my tiny studio all day," said Dave Marques, 24, a student and freelance writer.

But managers pressing for a return are finding themselves up against those employees attached to their newfound sense of comfort.

Before the pandemic, Ms. Gifford, in Pittsburgh, didn't understand why her workplace wouldn't just let her work. There was a high school-style clique in her office that talked about Fortnite, cryptocurrency and who had swept up winnings at the most recent poker night. Ms. Gifford said they only asked her about her family, as if being a mother were her entire personality.

"They all know each other, and they have these inside jokes," she said. "There's this strong sense of 'back in the day we were so tight knit, we've got to get back to the office.' And I'm like, 'I don't know what you're remembering.'"

When she's at home, Ms. Gifford can have conversations with colleagues confined to work, without overhearing their other chatter.

For Chantalle Couba, 46, a consultant in Charlotte, N.C., the specter of office banter is made worse by the gulf between her colleagues' experience of the pandemic and her own. To some of them, the past two years seemed to have meant: "Let me just retreat to my lake house." Ms. Couba, meanwhile, can't count even three people in her communities who have not lost loved ones to Covid-19.

One day recently, she started her morning on the phone with a friend who was trying to decide whether to cremate or bury her mother, who died of Covid. Then Ms. Couba had to hop on a work call and muddle through niceties. She was relieved to be at home, so she could hang up afterward and take time to breathe.

Last year, as Ms. Couba quietly checked on Black women in her circles, she found that for most of them leaving the office had been a source of relief. She sometimes thinks back on the workplace behaviors and microaggressions she used to confront. Once she sat near a man who read aloud resumes submitted by job candidates who didn't go to prestigious schools, then tossed them dramatically in the recycling bin.

“There are still a lot of spaces in a lot of industries where just being a woman of color is an outlier,” she said. “The side conversations, the pre-meeting conversations, the post-meeting conversations, the inside jokes — they all subtly add up to tell you that you don’t quite fit.”

“What have companies done to upskill senior leaders and managers so they’re going back into the office with empathy?” Ms. Couba added. “Not one single person who re-enters the office in the next three months is the same as the one who left.”

Employers can hear the rumblings of frustration. Salesforce last year rolled out a “success from anywhere” model, in which most of its employees can choose to be permanently remote or flexible, with a memo declaring the 9-to-5 workday dead and noting that nearly half of its staff want to come into an office only a few times per month. PricewaterhouseCoopers announced that some 40,000 of its employees would never be required to return to the office. Last month, Dow Jones and BNY Mellon told employees they would have more flexibility than many of their industry peers, with team leaders deciding how often their employees need to be in the office.

But workplace researchers worry that at many companies, return to office plans will have some “choose your own adventure” elements that penalize those who need flexibility. People might have to request permission from their managers to work from home, for example. Or managers might revive old notions about employee performance and develop a bias against those who can’t spend as much time in the office.

“It’s really important for managers to look at who are they promoting,” said Sheela Subramanian, vice president of Future Forum, Slack’s research consortium. “If everyone in the office looks like them or acts like them, they need to go back to the drawing board.”

And some employees, buoyed by the labor shortage, are holding their work-from-home ground, with some two-thirds of remote workers reluctant to return according to the jobs platform FlexJobs. Alice Lemmer, 64, who had worked in university services, quit in September before required return date for full in-person work. Beth Boucher, 40, who works in public health in New Hampshire, is part of a team gathering data on her organization’s productivity, hoping that management will be convinced to keep allowing remote work. One response to The Times questionnaire put it bluntly: “I won’t be going back to the office. Ever.”

Back in San Antonio, Ms. Egziabher recently put in two weeks’ notice at her old job. She received an offer to work at a company based in California that will allow her to be fully remote. The fixtures of her nearly two-decade career now seem like relics of a past she can’t imagine reinhabiting: high heels, early mornings, constant slights.

She says a little prayer of thanks for what remote work has allowed, an ethos strangely absent from the office: “Let’s just focus on the work.”

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HEADLINE	03/10 Poland attempts to smooth tension with US
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/10/world/ukraine-russia-war#andrezj-duda-poland-ukraine-fighter-jets
GIST	<p>WARSAW — In an apparent attempt to smooth tensions with the United States over a jet fighter deal, President Andrzej Duda of Poland said on Thursday that his government was responding to a request from Ukraine when it proposed transferring of Soviet-era planes to Ukraine to use against Russia.</p> <p>Poland this week offered to turn over its aging, Russian-made MiG fighters to the United States, saying they could then be transferred to Ukraine. The Polish government said it wanted the United States and NATO to carry out the transfer, then replace its own fleet with American-made fighter jets.</p> <p>U.S. officials said they were blindsided by the proposal, and the Pentagon all but rejected the idea on Wednesday.</p>

“That situation is extremely complicated,” Mr. Duda said in response to a question about whether he consulted with the United States before floating the idea. He spoke during a joint news conference with Vice President Kamala Harris.

“We have to be a responsible member of the North Atlantic alliance — that’s why there were requests addressed to us,” Mr. Duda said, referring to NATO, of which it is a member. “Those requests were addressed to us by the Ukrainian side, as well as to some extent the media.”

“We behaved as a reliable member of NATO should behave,” Mr. Duda said.

Poland’s proposal threatened to test NATO’s posture of unanimity in the face of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Washington says it wants to avoid taking any steps that could be viewed by Moscow as escalation that could potentially draw NATO into the war.

It also complicated a trip by the vice president, whose visit to Poland and Romania this week is intended to reassure NATO allies of American support against possible Russian aggression, and in managing the region’s growing refugee crisis.

Ms. Harris sidestepped questions over Poland’s fighter jets proposal, instead emphasizing the humanitarian and [security assistance](#) the United States has provided Ukraine and Poland. She announced that the United States would send nearly \$53 million in additional funds through the U.S. Agency for International Development to support Ukrainian refugees.

Ms. Harris also said that Russia should “absolutely” be investigated for war crimes in Ukraine.

Poland has received more than 1.3 million Ukrainian refugees, and Mr. Duda called on the Biden administration to accelerate the processing of refugees with relatives in the United States. He said that without help from the United Nations and other allies, “this will end up in a refugee disaster.”

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HEADLINE	03/10 ‘No off-ramps’: no clear Ukraine endgame
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/03/10/ukraine-end-game/
GIST	<p>When Russia first invaded Ukraine two weeks ago, the near-unanimous global assumption was that it would score a quick and easy military victory over its neighbor to the west.</p> <p>But now — with the Ukrainians waging a fierce resistance and Russian forces bogged down outside nearly every major city — the Biden administration and its allies say they see no clear end to the military phase of this conflict, according to interviews with 17 administration officials, diplomats, policymakers and experts. The situation seems destined to result in an even deadlier and more protracted slog, wreaking devastation in Ukraine and causing a massive humanitarian crisis.</p> <p>As the war enters its third week, President Biden and his team are also entering a murkier, more difficult stage of the conflict, where the new challenge is how to control the largely uncontrollable: Russian President Vladimir Putin and his endgame, whatever that may be.</p> <p>The Biden administration has successfully encouraged NATO and other Western allies to use nearly every available lever of power to sanction and punish Putin, but those efforts so far have had little discernible influence over the Russian president, who has only escalated his military offensive on cities and towns across Ukraine.</p> <p>Any outcome represents a lose-lose proposition, as even an eventual Russian defeat is likely to leave Ukraine decimated and its European neighbors bearing the brunt of the humanitarian crisis. So far, the United Nations human rights office reports that 516 civilians in Ukraine — including 37 children — have been killed since Feb. 24, adding that the actual toll is likely much higher. And during that same period, as many as 4,000 Russian troops may have died, a senior U.S. military officer said.</p>

“The longer that this goes on, the likelier it will be that Russia ends up being defeated, but also more likely that more people will die,” said a European diplomat, who, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity to share a candid assessment of the crisis.

Jim Townsend, the former deputy assistant secretary of defense for European and NATO policy, said that right now, “everyone is kind of feeling their way forward.”

“The endgame is going to be pretty complicated, and the endgame is going to have to deal with Putin as who he is, and it’s also going to have to deal with getting Ukraine back on its feet and also deal with what to do with these sanctions,” Townsend said.

The current U.S. strategy, according to senior Biden administration officials, is to ensure that the economic costs for Russia are severe and sustainable, as well as to continue supporting Ukraine militarily in its effort to inflict as many defeats on Russia as possible.

But U.S. military assistance remains limited, as Biden has made clear the United States is unwilling to get into a direct confrontation with Russia, a fellow nuclear power. Biden has said that he will not put any U.S. combat troops on the ground in Ukraine, and he and other NATO leaders have resisted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s pleas to enforce a no-fly zone over the country.

And despite repeatedly engaging in diplomatic efforts with Russia in the run-up to the invasion, Biden officials have largely not pursued diplomacy with Putin since the conflict began, citing the Kremlin’s lack of seriousness about such negotiations as the reason.

Now entering the third week of the crisis, for instance, the Biden administration has yet to engage directly with the Russian government over an off-ramp to curb the violence or any initial steps to bring an end to the war.

A senior administration official added, however, that the U.S. government has maintained channels to the Russians since the conflict began, including through the U.S. Embassy in Moscow; a “deconfliction channel,” or phone connection to the Russian Defense Ministry, administered out of European Command Headquarters; and other existing channels that U.S. officials would not detail, citing security concerns.

In lieu of direct negotiations between the United States and Russia, the governments of France, Israel, Turkey and Ukraine have all opened channels of communication with the Kremlin since the start of hostilities.

Discussions with those countries — which the Kremlin views as bit players in contrast to the United States — have failed to reach any constructive agreements. Foreign diplomats hope to persuade Putin to soften his demands on the “full demilitarization” of Ukraine, but U.S. and French officials remain skeptical those talks will bear fruit.

Talks between the foreign ministers of Ukraine and Russia in Turkey on Thursday failed to reach an agreement on a cease-fire or even modest measures to improve the humanitarian situation.

Despite the bleak prospects, U.S. officials say they are in no rush to directly engage Putin, whom they view as unserious about diplomacy.

“It’s important to remember that throughout this crisis created by Putin and Russia, we’ve sought to provide possible off-ramps to President Putin,” Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters in Washington on Wednesday. “He’s the only one who can decide whether or not to take them. So far, every time there’s been an opportunity to do just that, he’s pressed the accelerator and continued down this horrific road that he’s been pursuing.”

Blinken added that the Biden administration ultimately expects “a strategic defeat” of Putin and Russia, despite any “short-term tactical gains it may make in Ukraine.”

“We’ll accomplish this by backing Ukrainians in their fight, by remaining united in holding Russia accountable through the devastating sanctions, the diplomatic isolation and other measures,” Blinken said. “And we’ve already seen that Russia’s failed at its chief objectives. It’s not been able to hold Ukraine. It’s not going to be able to hold Ukraine in the long term — again, no matter what the tactical victories it may achieve are.”

A senior State Department official added that there are few “indications that the Russians are in any mood for serious diplomacy at the moment.”

“It’s hard to offer an overture when the Kremlin’s position continues to be that ‘we’ll continue to pummel Ukraine until and unless Ukraine changes its constitution ... demilitarizes [and] denazifies,’ whatever that means,” said the official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive U.S. decision.

But some analysts warn that the Biden administration doesn’t have the luxury of sitting back and allowing others to negotiate with Moscow as the prospect of a full-scale Russian bombardment of Ukraine’s biggest population centers looms.

“The Russians aren’t going to make concessions when they sit across the table from the French, Turks, Israelis or Ukrainians,” said Jeremy Shapiro, the research director at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

Still, Shapiro added, “the advantage that a negotiated peace has is that it can limit the violence, save many people’s lives; it can reduce the risk of escalation; and it can find a soft landing for both sides so they can try to move forward with a broader reconciliation.”

Samuel Charap, a senior political scientist at Rand Corp., also said it makes sense to try to negotiate directly with Russia using some of the leverage created in recent days by sanctions and other economic measures — even if the chances of Putin backing down or changing his goals are slim.

“There is a case to be made for the president of the United States to be the one trying to push Putin to change his war aims, negotiate with Zelensky and cease fire,” Charap said.

Meanwhile, European officials involved in the crisis discussions say that — as in Washington — their leaders at this point are exerting little energy toward trying to guide Putin to specific actions that could lead to a sanctions rollback, partly because they, too, remain skeptical that the Kremlin is ready to negotiate.

European leaders have also been spurred on by public opinion, which is now overwhelmingly in favor of tough measures against Russia. That dynamic helped drive the announcements a week ago of historically tough sanctions against Russia’s banking sector and its foreign reserves.

“It’s hard to see how this is going to end,” said one senior European diplomat, one of those who spoke on the condition of anonymity to share their take.

“It sounds bad to say that there are no off-ramps — but diplomatic ones, I don’t see them,” the official added, explaining that there are some issues on which leaders can’t compromise, including neutrality for Ukraine if that’s not something Ukraine itself desires.

Another senior European diplomat who was deeply involved in the sanctions discussions acknowledged there was a danger to imposing measures so powerful that they could eventually lead to Russia’s economic collapse. But the diplomat said that failing to apply harsh sanctions after the invasion would

be even more dangerous, because a weak response could embolden Putin to keep pushing forward into NATO territory.

Part of the challenge for the Biden administration is how to handle an adversary such as Putin, who some officials and analysts worry is liable to lash out further if he feels cornered.

And despite initial miscalculations, the Russian president may indeed feel boxed in. When he announced the invasion, Putin publicly stated that his goal was to “denazify” and “demilitarize” Ukraine — meaning that anything short of changing the Ukrainian government would be interpreted as a loss by his inner circle. The more Russia suffers economically, many experts and officials say, the more he is likely to feel the need to double down and bring home a victory.

In the run-up to the invasion, the Biden administration relied on the threat of devastating sanctions to deter Russia from launching its military offensive. But once that deterrence failed, the United States and its European allies followed through on their threats, implementing a set of damaging economic measures that included freezing the Russian central bank’s foreign currency reserves.

One risk is that Putin increasingly sees the measures not as sanctions designed to change his behavior in Ukraine, but as an effort to topple his government in Russia. The Biden administration has stressed, both publicly and privately, that it has no interest in regime change in Russia, said someone familiar with the private discussions.

But Putin has long feared an attempt by the United States to push him from power, and Western leaders have sent mixed messages on the intent of their endgame. European foreign policy chief Josep Borrell specifically said the sanctions are not aimed at regime change in Russia, but a spokesman for British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the measures were, in fact, aimed at bringing down Putin’s regime — comments Downing Street later recanted.

“If Putin believes he is in a fight for the survival of his regime, he is likely to be willing to escalate this — both within Ukraine and beyond, because the stakes become existential,” Charap said. “When you are fighting for your life, maybe literally, or certainly for the survival of your regime, which he conflates with the survival of the country, you could go to extreme lengths.”

Testifying on Capitol Hill on Tuesday, CIA Director William J. Burns articulated the challenge of dealing with Putin, noting that the Russian leader is increasingly isolated and that he is “angry and frustrated right now” after his series of strategic miscalculations and setbacks.

“He’s likely to double down and try to grind down the Ukrainian military with no regard for civilian casualties,” Burns said.

And while administration officials don’t know precisely how the conflict will end, they have been clear about how much of the outcome is dependent on Putin, as well as what their own preferred result is.

“The way this conflict will end is when Putin realizes that this adventure has put his own leadership standing at risk with his own military, with his own people, that he is hemorrhaging the lives of the people of Russia, the army of Russia, and their future to his own vain ambition. And he will have to change course or the Russian people will take matters into their own hands,” Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland, the No. 3 official at the State Department, testified Tuesday on Capitol Hill. “But from the U.S. perspective, the endgame is the strategic defeat of President Putin in this adventure.”

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HEADLINE	03/10 No cease-fire agreement; crisis worsens
SOURCE	https://thehill.com/policy/international/597647-no-cessate-fire-agreement-reached-in-meeting-between-ukraine-russia

GIST	<p>Top Ukrainian and Russian officials failed to agree to a cease-fire on Thursday as Moscow's invasion enters a third week and the humanitarian crisis worsens.</p> <p>Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said no progress was made on a cease-fire during discussions with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, according to Reuters. He said that Lavrov did not commit to a humanitarian cease-fire in one of the most critical areas, the southern port city of Mariupol.</p> <p>"I made a simple proposal to Minister Lavrov: I can call my Ukrainian ministers, authorities, president now and give you 100 percent assurances on security guarantees for humanitarian corridors," he told reporters after their meeting in Turkey.</p> <p>"I asked him, 'Can you do the same?' And he did not respond," Kuleba added.</p> <p>While the two sides did not come to an official agreement, Kuleba said they "agreed to continue efforts to seek a solution to the humanitarian issues on the ground," according to The New York Times.</p> <p>"I will be ready to meet again in this format if there are prospects for a substantial discussion and for seeking solutions," he added.</p> <p>Lavrov, meanwhile, told reporters that Russia was "not planning to attack other countries," according to the Times.</p> <p>"We didn't attack Ukraine, either," he added, further pushing Russia's claims that Moscow needed to conduct a "special military operation" in Ukraine for its security.</p> <p>Lavrov also responded to Ukraine's accusation that Russia bombed a children's hospital and maternity ward in Mariupol. He said that the building was no longer in use and was occupied by Ukrainian forces, Reuters noted, adding, however, that the Kremlin claimed that the bombing is still being investigated. Lavrov repeated Russian demands that Ukraine disarms and take a neutral status and blames the West for escalating the conflict, the news service noted. He added that Kyiv appears to want meetings for the sake of meetings.</p> <p>Moscow has said that it will only end the attack against Ukraine when all of its demands are met.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Still mask mandate air travel, public transit
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2022/03/10/transportation-mask-requirement-air-travel/
GIST	<p>Travelers will have to continue to wear masks until at least April 18 when flying commercially and in other transportation settings, including on buses, ferries and subways, officials announced Thursday.</p> <p>The mandate, put into place early last year by the Biden administration as a public health measure during the coronavirus pandemic, has been extended multiple times. It had been set to expire March 18 before the one-month extension, announced by the Transportation Security Administration.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said it would work with the TSA and other agencies to determine what changes to the policy are warranted. The mask requirement for transportation settings is one of the highest-profile federal pandemic-related mandates still in place.</p> <p>"This revised framework will be based on the COVID-19 community levels, risk of new variants, national data, and the latest science," the CDC said in a statement. The agency did not offer additional information on why it opted to extend the mandate.</p> <p>The extension of the mandate comes as airlines are expecting a surge in spring travel. The emergence of the omicron variant just after Thanksgiving dampened demand for flights, but carriers said they expected</p>

bookings to rebound. In recent weeks, information from the TSA shows an increase in the number of people screened at airport checkpoints.

The mandate has drawn criticism from some Republican lawmakers, including Sen. Roger Wicker (Miss.), who has lobbied to end the mask requirement.

Shortly before Thursday's announcement, Wicker, the top Republican on the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, and 30 other senators sent a letter to President Biden urging him to lift pandemic-related travel restrictions.

"I am disappointed President Biden has chosen to extend these mandates yet again," Wicker said in a statement after the announcement. "The science does not support this decision."

A group of 90 Republican House members, led by Reps. Guy Reschenthaler (Pa.) and Doug LaMalfa (Calif.), sent a similar letter to Administrator David Pekoske of the TSA earlier this week, saying the mask mandate should not be extended.

Sen. Rand Paul (Ky.) and other Republicans have introduced legislation aimed at rescinding the requirement.

Some in the transportation industry also had argued it was time for the rule to be set aside. The American Public Transportation Association wrote to the White House last week to say ending the mandate would help keep the country on a path "back to normality."

Industry and labor groups largely praised Biden for imposing the mandate shortly after he took office, but Thursday's announcement that it would be extended drew a tepid response, with some groups saying it was time to rethink the requirement.

Airlines for America, the trade group that represents major U.S. airlines, said its members would continue to comply with the mask mandate, but also urged the administration to "identify a path forward from covid-era policies," such as mask-wearing and pre-departure testing for international travelers.

The extension of the mask mandate comes after states have rolled back rules that people wear masks indoors and as the CDC has revised its rules on mask-wearing. The revised guidance details new metrics and color-coded zones designed to help individuals assess the risk in their community so they are able to determine whether extra precautions are needed.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said during a Thursday briefing that the extension of the transportation mask rules reflects the differences in coronavirus rates among communities.

"If we're in Washington, D.C., and we're in a green zone or a yellow zone, you can make a clear assessment," she said. "If you're moving from one zone to another zone and you're picking people up from one zone to another, it's a little bit different and that requires some consultation."

Panagis Galiatsatos, a pulmonary doctor at Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center in Baltimore, said while the CDC might want to make a distinction between crowded transportation settings and other public places, the national guidance about masks has become increasingly complicated.

"You're really putting a lot of emphasis on patients and people to differentiate what's a good setting," he said. "It's tough for people to make a consistent conclusion."

Galiatsatos said vaccination and masks are precautions that should remain in place until the end of the pandemic, with additional steps such as weekly testing used during surges.

Airlines began requiring customers to wear masks in mid-2020 as part of the effort to contain the spread of the virus. The Trump administration declined to put a mask mandate in place, but shortly after taking office, Biden issued an order that required mask-wearing in all transportation settings.

While numerous studies show mask-wearing can reduce the spread of the virus, the mandate has caused conflict on airplanes and in airports. Most incidents reported to the Federal Aviation Administration have been mask-related, the agency said.

In 2021, the FAA received nearly 6,000 reports of unruly passenger behavior and more than 70 percent of cases were mask-related. The agency has proposed more than \$1 million in fines related to disruptions that have included assaults on crew members, other passengers and violations of airline alcohol policies.

Hoping to deter bad behavior, the TSA — charged with enforcing the federal mask mandate in airports, on trains and in other transportation settings — last year doubled fines for violations to as much as \$1,000 for first offenders and up to \$3,000 for second offenders. The agency said in February that it has imposed nearly \$400,000 in civil penalties against more than 600 mask violators.

The Transport Workers Union said it could accept health guidance rooted in science, but in a statement Thursday, it linked the mask rule to an increase in violence.

“Unruly passengers were an issue that our members dealt with before the pandemic, but we have seen this behavior dramatically increase over the past two years since mask mandates were enacted,” said Alex Garcia, the union’s international executive vice president.

Children younger than 2 and people with certain disabilities are exempt from the mask requirement.

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HEADLINE	03/10 Uniqlo U-turn; suspends Russia operations
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2022/mar/10/uniqlo-suspends-operations-russia-u-turn-fashion
GIST	<p>The Japanese retailer Uniqlo is the latest international brand to suspend its Russian operations in a U-turn after pressure to take action over the war in Ukraine.</p> <p>Earlier this week Fast Retailing, the clothing chain’s owner, said it intended to keep its Russian shops open because clothing was a “necessity of life”, even as a string of brands from McDonald’s and Starbucks to Burberry and Asos suspended operations in the country.</p> <p>On Thursday, Fast Retailing issued a statement saying it was suspending its operations as it had “recently faced a number of difficulties, including operational challenges and the worsening of the conflict situation”.</p> <p>The company said it still believed making “everyday clothing available to the general public in Russia” was part of its mission but it had become clear it could no longer continue to do so because of the difficulties involved.</p> <p>“Our thoughts are with the people who are suffering today, and we will do whatever we can to support them during these very tragic times. We wish for the return of peace and stability as quickly as possible,” the company said.</p> <p>Fast Retailing previously announced a donation of \$10m to the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, to help people fleeing Ukraine. It also said employees in Europe had been helping deliver clothing to refugees.</p> <p>A host of international brands have suspended operations in Russia amid financial sanctions and public pressure in western countries to support Ukraine. Starbucks, Coca-Cola and Pepsi joined McDonald’s in pausing operations on Tuesday, as well as Netflix, Levi’s, Burberry and Ikea.</p>

	<p>The British beauty brand Lush said on Thursday that it had suspended supply to its Russian licensee and stopped online sales in the country. It is also in the process of buying out its licensee in Ukraine in order to secure the future of the business.</p> <p>Lush has 48 shops in Russia and 15 in Ukraine, employing more than 600 people. Its stores in Russia are continuing to operate and the company said it was “not in a position to dictate whether they are open or closed. They are governed by longstanding legal agreements that are not easily changed”.</p> <p>Sony and Nintendo have also halted shipments of gaming consoles and games to Russia.</p> <p>The owner of KFC and Pizza Hut said it was suspending the operations of 70 KFC company-owned restaurants in Russia and finalising an agreement to suspend all 50 Pizza Hut outlets in partnership with its master franchisee.</p> <p>On Wednesday, Mothercare, Heineken, the UK tobacco firm Imperial Brands and Universal Music Group joined the exodus.</p> <p>Unilever, the owner of Marmite and Ben & Jerry’s, said it had suspended imports and exports to Russia but continued to supply essential food and hygiene products made in the country to locals.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Ukraine mounts ‘hydraulic warfare’ in Kyiv?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/09/ukraine-intentional-flooding/
GIST	<p>In the early days of Russia’s invasion, Ukrainian soldiers and civilians scrambled to assemble their defenses, seeking to make moving through the country as difficult as possible for Moscow’s forces.</p> <p>They blew up bridges, used buses as makeshift roadblocks and welded homemade “Czech hedgehogs” to repel Russian tanks. And, according to a new set of satellite images, they may have also used one of the world’s oldest methods of fortification: water.</p> <p>Photographs from Planet Labs PBC, an American firm, and other researchers appear to show a large expanse of flooded land north of Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital. In a pair of before and after images, taken on Feb. 22 and Feb. 28, the swath of territory becomes significantly more sodden.</p> <p>The Washington Post was not able to confirm that the flooding was intentional, but Planet Labs said it consulted analysts who believe it was deliberate. If so, it would be the latest example of a centuries-old practice.</p> <p>“When you’re defending, you’re trying to use what you have,” said Marta Kepe, a senior defense analyst at the Rand Corp. “Throughout history, we have multiple examples where countries or military actors have built fortification lines — walls, trenches, fortresses and bunkers. But often we forget that rivers, marshes and water-based defense lines can also be used.”</p> <p>If it is intentional, Kepe added, “that may be what Ukrainians are trying to do — use water to prevent Russian forces from getting close to Kyiv.”</p> <p>The inundated area is north of Kyiv on the bank of the Dnieper River, somewhat to the east of where a 40-mile convoy of Russian troops has been idling for days. U.S. officials have credited this stall-out in part to Ukrainian efforts to slow it down.</p> <p>Deliberate flooding during combat — either to erect a barrier or destroy an area — is known as “hydraulic warfare,” and it has often been used to supplement a defensive strategy, Kepe said.</p>

	<p>“Ukraine is mounting a defensive operation in its own territory,” she said. “Considering that, I would assume that they would be able to use their superior knowledge of the terrain to their advantage. Hydraulic operations would require such in-depth knowledge of the terrain.”</p> <p>The Netherlands has been perhaps the most prolific employer of strategic, weaponized flooding. A 2015 research paper found that, from the years 1500 to 2000, about one-third of floods in the country’s southwest were deliberately caused during wartime. The tactic was often ineffective, the study found, and had far-reaching consequences for the land and local population.</p> <p>Water was used elsewhere in Europe as a natural defense line during World War II, including in Finland and the Soviet Union. The most notorious example of strategic flooding occurred in 1938, when the Chinese military breached the dikes of the Yellow River to slow the advance of Japan’s troops during the Second Sino Japanese War. The flood devastated the area and became known as “the largest act of environmental warfare in history.”</p> <p>The tactic can be “integrated into your national defense planning,” Kepe said, “but it can also be used as a last resort when you’re really trying to use any means possible for defense.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Get ready to ‘spring forward’ into DST
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/get-ready-to-spring-forward-into-daylight-saving-time-and-longer-days/
GIST	<p>Many Washingtonians might not like changing our clocks back and forth twice a year — as we’re set to do this Sunday when we spring forward one hour — but we sure do love our late summer sunsets.</p> <p>Rep. Marcus Riccelli of Spokane never saw such an enthusiastic response from constituents across the state as the year he and other lawmakers proposed ditching the switch and staying on permanent daylight saving time year-round.</p> <p>The proposal won overwhelming bipartisan support, was signed into law by Gov. Jay Inslee in May 2019, and seemed headed for Congress.</p> <p>But Congress hasn’t yet addressed the proposed Sunshine Protection Act, sponsored by Sen. Patty Murray of Washington and Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida.</p> <p>While states can move to permanent standard time without federal approval, congressional action is required to stay on daylight saving time. The Sunshine Protection Act would have amended the Uniform Time Act of 1966 and allow states to adopt permanent daylight saving time.</p> <p>Though year-round daylight saving time is popular with outdoor enthusiasts, people who like to party and those who like to sell things to them, standard time is significantly better for most people, said Horacio de la Iglesia, a professor of biology at the University of Washington. His work on sleep cycles contributed to Seattle Public Schools decision to start school later for middle and high school students.</p> <p>That’s because our bodies want to sync with natural daylight hours.</p> <p>Daylight saving time is what we observe from March through November each year. For many people, it’s a turning point from the short dark days of winter to the longer evenings and later sunsets of summer.</p> <p>In Seattle, it doesn’t have a hugely detrimental effect on our moods and sleep cycles in spring and summer because there’s still plenty of morning light, he said, but winter is a different story.</p> <p>On Seattle’s shortest day, the sun rises at around 8 a.m. and sets just after 4 p.m. If Washington switched to year-round DST, the sun would rise at 9 a.m. and set at 5 p.m. that day in Seattle.</p>

“You may think that the extra hour of evening light we gain with DST is good for you,” he explained. “But research shows that the hour of morning light we miss out on under DST is unhealthy for your body and mind.”

Human sleep patterns prefer to be in sync with “solar time,” he said, and standard time is closer to true solar time.

De la Iglesia said that under DST — when the clock is artificially shifted an hour ahead — we are asking our brains and bodies to wake up an hour earlier than they are biologically prepared to do. Sleep and mood disorders would follow, he said.

Being on daylight saving time in the middle of the winter “would be like Monday morning every day for the rest of your life.”

The U.S. experimented with year-round DST after the 1973 oil embargo by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries. In an effort to conserve fuel and reduce dependence on foreign sources, Congress enacted a trial period of permanent DST that was supposed to begin on Jan. 6, 1974, and end April 27, 1975.

By fall, the dark mornings proved too much, according to David Prerau, author of *Seize the Daylight: The Curious and Contentious Story of Daylight Saving Time*.

Ten months in, the act was amended and on Oct. 27, 1974, clocks were set back an hour and the country returned to observing standard time during the four darkest months and DST the other eight.

De la Iglesia, who began studying human sleep about 10 years ago, said the negative impacts of year-round DST would be even greater in today’s world due to the prevalence of screens and artificial light that stimulate the circadian system.

Rates of depression can increase when you “ask people to wake up and perform in the middle of the night,” he said.

And even though the momentum behind the push for change appears to have waned since 2019, when more than two dozen states were considering measures to avoid the twice-yearly clock change, de la Iglesia said there’s still concern.

“There are still a lot of people trying to push for permanent daylight saving time, not just here but on the federal level,” he said.

On Wednesday, [a congressional panel debated whether to end the nation’s daylight saving policy](https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/uw-survey-of-drug-users-shows-fentanyl-surge-as-king-county-sets-record-for-overdose-deaths/) with its biannual shifting the clock. Most agreed it was time.

But let’s leave the worrying to others just for a bit. We made it through another Seattle winter.

Let’s set our clocks forward on Sunday and enjoy the light while we can.

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HEADLINE	03/10 King Co. sets record for overdose deaths
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/uw-survey-of-drug-users-shows-fentanyl-surge-as-king-county-sets-record-for-overdose-deaths/
GIST	<p>Fentanyl use has surged in King County and across the state at an alarming rate, according to a new survey from University of Washington researchers.</p> <p>Among people surveyed at syringe-service sites last fall, 42% said they’d used the synthetic opioid in the previous three months, up from 18% in 2019.</p>

And it's a potentially deadly trend.

Fentanyl-involved deaths more than doubled in King County last year, reaching 388, [according to](#) the Medical Examiner's Office.

Meanwhile, the county set a record in 2021 for total drug and alcohol overdose deaths, with at least 709 (11 more are still listed as pending). [The prior record](#), set in 2020, was 511.

"I've been doing drug-trends research for 20 years, and fentanyl's growth is the biggest, fastest shift we've ever seen — and also the most lethal," UW researcher Caleb Banta-Green said in a news release this week.

In an interview Wednesday, he called the overdose numbers "striking to me as a human being, a Seattleite and an epidemiologist."

Banta-Green is the principal research scientist at UW's Addictions, Drug & Alcohol Institute, which conducts a biennial survey at syringe-service sites.

Nearly 1,000 people participated in the 2021 survey, conducted in September and October at sites in 20 counties. They included people using drugs for various reasons, at various levels.

Most participants in the 2021 survey who reported using fentanyl said they'd done so intentionally. That's a change. Previously, most people reported using fentanyl unintentionally, mixed with another drug.

Superpotent (50 to 100 times stronger than morphine) and cheap compared to some drugs, illegally manufactured fentanyl pills are often smoked off foil, providing a rapid, intense and short-lived high. The drug can take users on an extreme "roller coaster," with as many as a dozen ups and downs each day, Banta-Green said Wednesday. Users may not know how strong the pills are.

Though the UW survey was aimed at people who inject drugs (people who visit syringe-service sites), 72% of the people who reported using fentanyl (alone or mixed in other drugs) said they had smoked the drug, while only 47% said they had injected it.

Most participants reported both injecting and smoking drugs. The most-cited reason for smoking opioids rather than injecting them was "can't hit veins anymore," followed by "smoking is more social."

"The majority of people dying now from overdoses are smoking drugs. Yet almost all of our harm-reduction services have been aimed at people who inject," Banta-Green said in the UW news release, calling for adjustments in how programs try to keep users safe and connect them with help.

The survey results and overdose numbers jibe with some other indicators.

Seattle police and federal agents seized 650,000 pills [last year](#) — 10 times more than in 2020. Narcotics smoking aboard transit [recently surpassed](#) needles and marijuana as a source of complaints by King County Metro bus and train drivers. Fentanyl has been part of the picture at intersections targeted lately by Seattle police [in the Little Saigon International District](#) and [downtown](#).

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HEADLINE	03/10 Inflation soars 7.9% past year to 40yr-high
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-biden-business-united-states-europe-776c03520c90083894fedf31f1a7db00
GIST	WASHINGTON (AP) — Propelled by surging costs for gas, food and housing, consumer inflation jumped 7.9% over the past year, the sharpest spike since 1982 and likely only a harbinger of even higher prices to come.

The increase [reported Thursday by the Labor Department](#) reflected the 12 months ending in February and didn't include most of the oil and gas price increases that followed Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24. Since then, average gas prices nationally have jumped about 62 cents a gallon to \$4.32, according to AAA.

Even before the war further accelerated price increases, robust consumer spending, [solid pay raises](#) and persistent supply shortages had sent U.S. inflation to its highest level in four decades. What's more, housing costs, which make up about a third of the government's consumer price index, have risen sharply, a trend that's unlikely to reverse anytime soon.

The government's report Thursday also showed that inflation rose 0.8% from January to February, up from the 0.6% increase from December to January.

For most Americans, inflation is running far ahead of the pay raises that many have received in the past year, making it harder for them to afford necessities like food, gas and rent. As a consequence, inflation has become the top political threat to President Joe Biden and congressional Democrats as the midterm elections draw closer. Small business people say in surveys that it's their primary economic concern, too.

Seeking to stem the inflation surge, the Federal Reserve is set to raise interest rates several times this year beginning with a quarter-point hike next week. The Fed faces a delicate challenge, though: If it tightens credit too aggressively this year, it risks undercutting the economy and possibly triggering a recession.

From January to February, nearly every category of goods and services got pricier. Grocery costs jumped 1.4%, the sharpest one-month increase since 1990, other than during a pandemic-induced price surge two years ago. The cost of fruits and vegetables rose 2.3%, the largest monthly increase since 2010. Gas prices spiked 6.6%, clothing 0.7%.

For the 12 months ending in February, grocery prices leapt 8.6%, the biggest year-over-year increase since 1981, the government said. Gas prices are up a whopping 38%. And housing costs have risen 4.7%, the largest yearly jump since 1991.

Energy prices, which soared after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, jumped again this week after Biden said the United States would bar oil imports from Russia. Oil prices did retreat Wednesday on reports that the United Arab Emirates will urge fellow OPEC members to boost production. U.S. oil was down 12% to \$108.70 a barrel, though still up from about \$90 before Russia's invasion.

Yet energy markets have been so volatile that it's impossible to know if the decline will stick. If Europe were to join the U.S. and the United Kingdom and bar Russian oil imports, analysts estimate that prices could soar as high as \$160 a barrel.

The economic consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine have upended a broad assumption among many economists and at the Fed: That inflation would begin to ease this spring because prices rose so much in March and April of 2021 that comparisons to a year ago would show declines.

Should gas prices remain near their current levels, Eric Winograd, senior economist at asset manager AllianceBernstein, estimates that inflation could reach as high as 9% in March or April.

The cost of wheat, corn, cooking oils and such metals as aluminum and nickel have also soared since the invasion. Ukraine and Russia are leading exporters of those commodities.

Even before Russia's invasion, inflation was not only rising sharply but also broadening into additional sectors of the economy. Many prices have jumped over the past year because heavy demand has run into short supplies of items like autos, building materials and household goods.

	<p>But even for some services unaffected by the pandemic, like rents, costs are also surging at their fastest pace in decades. Steady job growth and high home prices are encouraging more people to move into apartments, elevating rental costs by the most in two decades. Apartment vacancy rates have reached their lowest level since 1984.</p> <p>In the final three months of last year, wages and salaries jumped 4.5%, the sharpest such increase in at least 20 years. Those pay raises have, in turn, led many companies to raise prices to offset their higher labor costs.</p> <p>Soaring energy costs pose a particularly difficult challenge for the Fed. Higher gas prices tend to both accelerate inflation and weaken economic growth. That's because as their paychecks are eroded at the gas pump, consumers typically spend less in other ways.</p> <p>That pattern is akin to the "stagflation" dynamic that made the economy of the 1970s miserable for many Americans. Most economists, though, say they think the U.S. economy is growing strongly enough that another recession is unlikely, even with higher inflation.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Colleges cut Russia programs, financial ties
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-congress-europe-education-b544cec780609023d4da201ccccb9dcc
GIST	<p>Colleges across the U.S. are pulling students from study abroad programs in Russia, ending research partnerships and cutting financial ties as part of a global wave of condemnation over the invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>At the same time, colleges have promised to support Russian students on their campuses, opposing calls from a few in Congress to remove them from the country as a sanction against their homeland.</p> <p>The moves are mostly symbolic — U.S. colleges have little power to sway Russia or squeeze its finances, and academic exchange between the nations has always been meager. But the suggestion that some or all Russian students should forfeit the opportunity to study here has drawn new attention to the role of universities in global disputes.</p> <p>Last academic year, U.S. colleges hosted nearly 5,000 students from Russia, less than 1% of all international students. Advocates for international education say losing those students would forgo a chance to expose them to western ideals, and they say Russians who choose to study in America are already more likely to want change back home.</p> <p>"Leaders need to make a distinction between Putin and Russian people who want a better life," said Jill Welch, a senior adviser for the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, a coalition of university presidents. "Sending anyone back wouldn't shorten any war by a day."</p> <p>Many universities have called for compassion for students from Russia who, like those from Ukraine, may fear for the safety of family members or face sudden financial difficulty.</p> <p>In a message to students, Columbia University's president said students from both countries face a "bewildering and uncertain road ahead."</p> <p>At the University of Washington, President Ana Mari Cauce said the campus stands with Ukraine but "must also take care to not let the actions of Russia's authoritarian government affect our treatment of Russian students, scholars and community members who have no role in its policies."</p> <p>Some in Congress have pushed for visa restrictions against Russian students. Speaking on CNN last month, Rep. Eric Swalwell, D-Calif., said the U.S. should consider "kicking every Russian student out of the United States" as a way to stir backlash against Vladimir Putin in Russia.</p>

The idea has gained little support in Washington, but the White House later suggested that its separate sanctions against Russian oligarchs are partly intended to block access to U.S. universities.

“What we’re talking about here is seizing their assets, seizing their yachts, and making it harder for them to send their children to colleges and universities in the West,” press secretary Jen Psaki said last week while discussing the sanctions.

College leaders aren’t fighting the idea that oligarchs and their children should lose access to American education. But wider action against Russian students would carry echoes of America’s discrimination toward Japanese and German immigrants during World War II, advocates say.

“In our country, we do not punish children for the crimes of their parents,” said Barbara Snyder, president of the Association of American Universities and a former president of Case Western Reserve University. “You have to think carefully about the consequences of targeting people because of their country of origin.”

For many colleges, the first priority has been to remove American students studying in Russia or Ukraine, although few are believed to have been there. A total of 1,400 Americans studied in those nations in 2018, and overall study abroad figures have plummeted during the pandemic.

Middlebury College in Vermont suspended a study abroad program in Russia at the end of February citing safety concerns, urging the 12 students to return home. Among them was Xavier Ridgley, who was studying in Moscow when he was told to book a flight home quickly.

The 22-year-old said he respects the decision but was disappointed. A senior at Tulane University, he had been trying to get into the Middlebury program since 2019, but it had been delayed by the pandemic.

“The month I’ve been here has been nothing short of the opportunity of a lifetime, and to have it cut so short so abruptly really is terribly sad,” said Ridgley, who has since returned home.

Other schools have joined in barring student travel to Russia, and some including Dartmouth College have canceled upcoming study abroad programs. A growing number are also severing financial and academic ties as a rebuke of Putin, but the U.S. response has been more scattered compared with Europe, where nations including Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark have ordered colleges to freeze academic exchange with Russia.

Soon after the invasion began, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology said it was ending its partnership with the Skolkovo Institute of Science and Technology, a research university it helped found near Moscow in 2011. MIT officials called it a rejection of “the unacceptable military actions against Ukraine.”

After Colorado Gov. Jared Polis urged universities to cut investments with Russia last week, the University of Colorado said it was divesting all holdings in the country, including \$3.5 million in mutual funds.

Several other states have also told colleges to pull investments, including Virginia, Ohio and Arizona.

Presidents of Arizona’s public universities notified the state Monday that they were ending financial and academic ties with Russia in response to an order from the state’s board of regents. Arizona State University announced it will part with a corporate training center in Moscow affiliated with its business school.

Other colleges are reviewing contracts or financial donations from Russian sources, but some had no plans to return the money or end deals.

	<p>Stanford University received \$1.6 million through a contract with an undisclosed Russian source in December 2020, according to U.S. Education Department records. A university spokesperson said it's an agreement for online business courses and that Stanford is in "full compliance" with U.S. sanctions.</p> <p>Last year, Rutgers University reported a new contract with Russia. The school said it's a deal with the Russian State University for the Humanities in Moscow for research and information exchange through November 2023. Officials said the agreement is currently inactive.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Covid-19 pandemic changed after 2 years?
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-lifestyle-pandemics-covid-19-pandemic-982fe27ac0c1a90156bee436b3f265ac
GIST	<p>How has the COVID-19 pandemic changed after two years?</p> <p>More countries are shifting toward a return to normal and learning to live with the virus. Safe, effective vaccines have been developed and there's better understanding of how to treat people sickened by the virus.</p> <p>Two years after the pandemic began, questions remain about the coronavirus. But experts know a lot more about how to keep it under control.</p> <p>The virus mainly spreads through the air when an infected person exhales, talks, coughs or sneezes. It's why health officials have encouraged the use of masks and ventilating spaces, instead of focusing on advice to wipe down surfaces as they did early on.</p> <p>Treatment has also evolved for people who get sick or need to be hospitalized. Among the options are antivirals, such as the drug remdesivir, or newer pills from Pfizer and Merck; anti-inflammatory drugs including steroids; and depending on what variant is circulating, lab-made antibodies to attack the virus.</p> <p>"The world has watched us learn in real-time how to treat COVID-19," says Neil J. Sehgal, an assistant professor of health policy and management at the University of Maryland School of Public Health.</p> <p>COVID-19 vaccines were also developed in record time. As of early March, 10 vaccines have been cleared for emergency use by the World Health Organization.</p> <p>Still, distribution of vaccines has been unequal despite an international effort to deliver shots more fairly and misinformation has fueled hesitancy about the shots.</p> <p>And there's still much left to learn. Studies are underway to better understand long COVID-19, which can persist for months after an initial infection. And scientists are on the lookout for the next fast-spreading variant.</p> <p>"Eventually every country will have to learn to live with COVID," says Sehgal.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Inside 1st official 'safe injection sites' in US
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/inside-nyc-supervised-drug-injection-sites-7ad93117d1566fda53909c0f70984d1b
GIST	<p>NEW YORK (AP) — Jose Collado settled in at a clean white table in a sunlit room, sang a few bars and injected himself with heroin.</p> <p>After years of shooting up on streets and rooftops, he was in one of the first two facilities in the country where local officials are allowing illegal drug use in order to make it less deadly.</p>

Equipped and staffed to reverse overdoses, New York City's new, privately run "overdose prevention centers" are a bold and contested response to [a storm tide of opioid overdose deaths nationwide](#).

Supporters say the sites — also known as safe injection sites or supervised consumption spaces — are humane, realistic responses to the deadliest drug crisis in U.S. history. Critics see them as illegal and defeatist answers to the harm that drugs wreak on users and communities.

To Collado, 53, the room he uses regularly is simply "a blessing."

"They always worry about you, and they're always taking care of you," he says.

"They make sure that you don't die," adds his friend Steve Baez. At 45, he's come close a couple of times.

In their first three months, the sites in upper Manhattan's East Harlem and Washington Heights neighborhoods halted more than 150 overdoses during about 9,500 visits — many of them repeat visits from some 800 people in all. The sites are planning to expand to round-the-clock service later this year.

"It's a loving environment where people can use safely and stay alive," says Sam Rivera, the executive director of OnPoint NYC, a nonprofit that runs the centers. "We're showing up for people who too many people view as disposable."

Supervised drug-consumption sites go back decades in Europe, Australia and Canada. Several U.S. cities and [the state of Rhode Island](#) have approved the concept, but no authorized sites were actually operating until New York's [opened in November](#) (researchers have documented an underground site in an undisclosed U.S. location for several years). New York's announcement came six weeks after the [U.S. Supreme Court let stand a lower court ruling that a planned Philadelphia site was illegal](#) under a 1986 federal law against running a venue for illicit drug use.

Despite winning the Philadelphia case, [the U.S. Justice Department indicated last month it might stop fighting](#) such sites, saying it was evaluating them and discussing "appropriate guardrails."

New York City's only Republican in Congress, Rep. Nicole Malliotakis, has pressed the Justice Department to shutter what she sees as "heroin shooting galleries that only encourage drug use and deteriorate our quality of life."

She has proposed to strip federal money from any private group, state or local government that "operates or controls" a safe injection site. (Her efforts spurred a protest in lower Manhattan Wednesday by VOCAL-NY, a social service group interested in eventually opening a consumption site.)

Another New Yorker in Congress, Democratic Rep. Carolyn Maloney, is a leading sponsor of an addiction-fighting proposal that could make money available for such facilities. Organizers say the New York sites currently run on private donations, though their parent group gets city and state money for syringe exchange, counseling and many other services offered alongside the consumption rooms.

Several state and city officials have embraced them. But they also fueled a December protest that drew over 100 people, including U.S. Rep. Adriano Espaillat, a New York Democrat, to complain that drug programs in general are unfairly concentrated in the injection sites' neighborhoods and kept out of whiter, wealthier areas.

"The safe consumption site is doing God's work, but they're doing it in the wrong place," says Shawn Hill, who co-founded a neighborhood group called the Greater Harlem Coalition.

People bring their own drugs — of whatever type — to the consumption rooms, but they're stocked with syringes, alcohol wipes, straws for snorting, other paraphernalia and, crucially, oxygen and the opioid-overdose-reversing drug naloxone.

Staffers, some of whom have used illegal drugs themselves, watch for signals of overconsumption or other needs, from advice on injection technique to more complicated help.

Resting a supportive hand on the shoulder of a slumping, dejected man, Adrian Feliciano encouraged him to talk with a mental health counselor — and brought one in — on a recent afternoon.

“For a lot of our folks, just providing a safe space is an introduction to services,” Feliciano, the center’s clinical and holistic care director, said afterward.

For all the services it offers and the overdoses it has turned around, OnPoint has also come up against its limits. During a 10-day span in February, two regulars died and a third was in a coma for a time after apparent overdoses elsewhere when the sites were closed at night, according to senior program director Kailin See, who believes longer hours would have saved those who died (the third person recovered).

There have been no recorded deaths in supervised injection facilities in countries that permit them, and there’s some evidence linking them to fewer overdose deaths and ambulance calls in their neighborhoods, according to a 2021 report that compiled existing studies.

The report, by the Boston-based Institute for Clinical and Economic Review, found no link between safe injection sites and the rates of various crimes, though public drug use dropped off in some places.

“If you believe in harm reduction, here’s harm reduction that saves you money” in ambulance runs, said Dr. David Rind, the think tank’s chief medical officer.

But to Jim Crotty, a former Drug Enforcement Administration official during the Obama and Trump administrations, the sites’ lifesaving purpose comes at steep social cost.

“The goal can’t simply be to keep people alive,” said Crotty, who argues that policymakers should concentrate instead on expanding drug treatment. “If you believe, like me, that doing drugs is very destructive, then the goal has to be to stop doing drugs.”

Rivera, for his part, stresses the need to stanch the flow of drugs into the U.S., rather than what he sees as blaming people in poor communities “for using the drugs that were let in.” OnPoint says staffers regularly foster, but don’t force, conversations about treatment, which many clients have already tried.

“You need to be alive to try again,” See says.

Collado has tried to quit drugs, stopping at times during his four decades of using, he said. Like many of people who use the consumption rooms, he lives on the streets.

He and Baez look out for each other. They’ve helped one another solve problems, shared money when one was broke, and tried to make sure that neither would overdose and die alone. The room, and everything offered along with it, fill that last role now, and more.

“This is my home right here,” Collado said. “This is my family.”

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HEADLINE	03/10 More filed jobless claims last week
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/covid-business-health-jobless-claims-e87da417053f1706ce401b13df2676c5
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — Slightly more Americans applied for unemployment benefits last week, but layoffs have settled to the low, pre-pandemic levels seen before the coronavirus recession in 2020.</p> <p>Jobless claims rose by 11,000 to 227,000 for the week ending March 5, the Labor Department reported Thursday. The previous week’s number was 216,000. First-time applications for jobless aid generally track the pace of layoffs.</p>

The four-week average for claims, which compensates for weekly volatility, rose by 500 to 230,750.

In total, 1,474,000 Americans were collecting jobless aid the week that ended Feb. 26, up slightly from the week before that. The four-week moving average for that number is at its lowest level in more than 50 years.

Last week, the government reported that employers added a robust 678,000 jobs in February, the largest monthly total since July. The unemployment rate dropped to 3.8%, from 4% in January, extending a sharp decline in joblessness to its lowest level since before the pandemic erupted two years ago.

At the other end of the equation, U.S. businesses posted a near-record level of open jobs in January. That trend has helped pad workers' pay and added to inflationary pressures.

Employers posted 11.3 million jobs at the end of January, down slightly from a record of 11.4 million in December, Labor reported Wednesday.

The number of people quitting their jobs slipped to 4.25 million, down from 4.4 million, though January's figure is still 23% above pre-pandemic levels. Millions of people are jumping to switch jobs, often for higher pay.

Average hourly pay increased 5.1% in February compared with a year earlier, according to U.S. statistics released last week, a rapid gain that forces companies to either become more efficient or raise prices to offset higher labor costs.

The U.S. economy expanded 5.7% in 2021, growing last year at the fastest annual pace since a 7.2% surge in 1984, which also followed a recession.

Propelled by surging costs for gas, food and housing, consumer inflation jumped 7.9% over the past year, the sharpest spike since 1982 and likely only a harbinger of even higher prices to come. The increase reported Thursday by the Labor Department reflected the 12 months ending in February and didn't include most of the oil and gas price increases that followed Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24.

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HEADLINE	03/10 Russia's war roils financial markets
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/10/business/russia-ukraine-war-gas-prices.html
GIST	<p>It's getting to the point where you're better off filling up your gas tank in the morning because the price will be higher by the time you drive home.</p> <p>This is an exaggeration, but not much of one. The price of gasoline was already rising before Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, and it has risen every day since then. As the most important measure of inflation that most Americans regularly see, this daily increase is a big problem in itself.</p> <p>But it's more than that: It's a tax on working people, a drag on economic growth and a conspicuous emblem of the acute problems afflicting a range of financial assets, from stocks and bonds to commodities like gold, nickel and wheat.</p> <p>These issues are minor compared with the anguish that the Russian onslaught has inflicted on Ukrainians. But it's worth noting that both Russia's brutal invasion as well as Western efforts to counter it and aid Ukraine are spilling over into global financial markets, affecting, in ways big and small, virtually everyone in the United States and around the world.</p> <p>Prices at the pump</p> <p>Consider that since the Russian invasion, the average price of regular gas in the United States had increased 17 percent through Wednesday. It was up 23 percent from the beginning of the year.</p>

On Tuesday alone, the average price of a gallon of regular rose 8 cents, to \$4.25 from \$4.17 according to statistics compiled by the [AAA](#) motor club, and it's much higher in states like California, where a gallon of regular cost \$5.57, on average. For a variety of [reasons](#), the price in many communities is much steeper than that.

More price increases, and big ones, are already inevitable.

Gasoline prices are based on the cost of crude oil, which jumped in response to the invasion and Western sanctions. With the announcement on Tuesday that the United States and Britain would ban imports of Russian energy, the climb in world oil prices appeared to be far from over.

Where oil prices go, wholesale and retail prices for gasoline eventually follow, as Paul Ashworth, chief U.S. economist for Capital Economics, explained in an interview on Monday. Even if the price of oil went no higher, the average price of retail gas in the United States would reach \$4.50 a gallon by April, he said. "That's just the way the markets work," he said. Further increases seem likely.

In fact, after the American and British announcements, [Mark Zandi](#), chief economist of Moody's analytics, said on [Twitter](#) on Tuesday that he expected world oil prices to rise to \$150 a barrel — an increase of more than 20 percent — "at least for a few weeks until things begin to sort out." That would translate to about \$5 for a gallon of regular unleaded gasoline, on average.

Current gasoline prices already surpass the [previous](#) records, which were set in the summer of 2008, if you don't account for inflation. If you do take inflation into account, the picture isn't very comforting, either. In July 2008, it cost roughly \$5.35 for a gallon of regular in today's money. Remember what happened next? Two months later, [Lehman Brothers](#) collapsed, helping to set off a global [financial crisis](#), a stock market crash and a severe [recession](#).

Gasoline and oil prices were not the immediate causes of those calamities but, as [James D. Hamilton](#), professor of economics at the University of California, San Diego, concluded in a [paper](#) in 2009, they "made a material contribution" to the recession.

A regressive tax on working people

Price increases for gasoline and other basics are already hurting people with tight budgets who must drive to work or school — and who can't cut back on food purchases.

Yardeni Research, an independent economic and stock market consultant, estimated that the average American household would spend roughly \$3,100 on gasoline in 2022, based on price levels in December 2021. The price increases since then mean that households would have to pay about \$2,000 more.

That's not a big deal if you're wealthy or if you own an electric vehicle. But for many working people, it's equivalent to a tax.

"A lot of people have little choice," Mr. Ashworth of Capital Economics said. "They have to drive."

In addition, food prices have been increasing. Russia and Ukraine accounted for 28 percent of the global wheat trade and 18 percent of corn exports last year. The futures price of wheat has risen 36 percent this year and 27 percent since the war started on Feb. 24.

The story is similar for corn, barley and sunflower oil, commodities for which Russia and Ukraine are major players. Shipments through Black Sea ports have been obstructed, financial sanctions are limiting trade — and futures prices are spiking.

This is beginning to translate into food inflation in the United States — and quite possibly into a [hunger](#) crisis around the globe in the months ahead.

In the United States, Yardeni Research estimates, the average household will have to spend \$1,000 more on food this year, given the difference between price trends now and in December 2021.

Combined, those increased costs for food and gas this year could amount to about \$3,000. They have the effect of a hefty tax, one that's extremely regressive, in that it hits lower-income people much harder than the rich.

Headaches for the Fed

This creates additional challenges for the Federal Reserve, which already has plenty of them.

Inflation has been running hot for a while. The Consumer Price Index for February, which is to be released on Thursday, is likely to be even higher than the [7.5 percent](#) annual rate that was reported last month.

The spillover effects of the war will probably result in a high inflation reading next month as well. After that, year-over-year comparisons with high inflation caused in large part by supply-chain disruptions during the pandemic will start to make the inflation numbers look better.

But if commodity prices keep rising, the inflation numbers won't go down rapidly as I, and many economists, had [thought](#) only a month ago. So the Fed will remain under considerable pressure to begin raising interest rates at its meeting next Tuesday and Wednesday. Higher interest rates could slow the economy.

At the same time, price increases and reductions in consumer spending imposed by the war are likely to be a drag on the economy. With the combination of rising interest rates and an oil shock, two unpleasant words are coming back into circulation: stagflation and recession.

They are just possibilities, but worries about them are weighing on the markets.

Stock and bond markets in disarray

Yields on long-term bonds have fluctuated, suggesting the markets have little conviction about where the economy is headed.

If the Fed does raise rates, it won't take much for short-term interest rates to exceed the level of long-term ones — which would be another bad omen for the economy. Such a juxtaposition of interest rates, known as a [yield curve inversion](#), has often preceded recessions.

The broad stock market has gotten off to one of its worst starts since 1900, Bloomberg records show. The markets are swinging up and down. But already this year, the S&P 500 has been down more than 10 percent from its peak, a drop known on Wall Street as a [correction](#), while the Nasdaq composite has been more than 20 percent below its November peak, putting it into what Wall Street calls bear market territory. Commodity bets have paid off. The iShares S&P GSCI Commodity-Index Trust, an exchange-traded fund that tracks a diversified group of commodities, is up 51 percent this year. Energy stocks have soared, but little else has done well.

For long-term investors with balanced, diversified portfolios containing stocks and bonds, declines like this occur periodically. They can be painful, but if history echoes itself, the stock market will recover and surpass its past highs.

If the effective closing of Russian financial markets and rising commodity prices lead to a steeper stock market decline, or have other, unexpected consequences, the Fed will be in a tough place. It is moving toward tightening monetary conditions but might have to reverse itself and engage in another rescue operation, as it did in March 2020.

This is a risky moment, as Liz Ann Sonders and Kevin Gordon of Charles Schwab said in a [note](#) on Monday. It's conceivable that the war could end abruptly, and energy prices could sharply decline, but "betting on that in the near term seems a fool's errand."

	It's remarkable that in March 2022, decades after the oil shocks of the 1970s and the fall of the Berlin Wall, we're worrying about oil and gas prices and a renewed Cold War, and not focusing on combating climate change and ending the pandemic. But to return to those concerns, we will have to get past the Russian war.
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HEADLINE	03/10 Omicron continues to surge in parts of Asia
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/10/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine#omicron-cases-continue-to-spike-in-parts-of-asia
GIST	<p>The once severe Omicron wave that has retreated in much of the world is still flaring up in parts of East and Southeast Asia, where caseloads are rising and some countries are enduring their worst waves of the pandemic, the World Health Organization noted this week.</p> <p>Many places in the region had kept caseloads fairly low throughout the pandemic because of their strict policies, including “zero Covid” approaches in mainland China and Hong Kong, as well as in New Zealand.</p> <p>But the Omicron surge has worsened in parts of Asia since December — including in Japan, South Korea and Vietnam — and in Pacific island countries like New Zealand and Tonga. Tonga recorded its first community transmission of the coronavirus last month after aid workers came to help the island nation recover from a volcanic eruption and a subsequent tsunami.</p> <p>Coronavirus policies in parts of Asia have generally been far stricter than in the Americas. Some countries in the Americas have eased those policies even further in the past few weeks as Omicron cases have dropped, a move that W.H.O. officials said on Wednesday was happening too soon.</p> <p>The United States, along with Brazil, Germany, Indonesia, Japan and Russia, reported high death counts from Feb. 28 to Sunday, the agency said. Germany and Russia were still reporting high caseloads — although the agency reported on Tuesday that new cases and deaths had slowed worldwide during that time period.</p> <p>Last month, the agency said that a more contagious Omicron subvariant had been spreading quickly and had become dominant in Denmark and in several Asian countries, including Bangladesh, China, India, Pakistan and the Philippines. But on Tuesday the agency said that the predominant Omicron subvariant still accounted for slightly more cases globally. Some scientists had been concerned that the more contagious variant's greater transmissibility could cause a fresh spike or prolong the Omicron wave.</p> <p>Scientists had also wondered whether people infected with one Omicron subvariant could be reinfected with another. The W.H.O. reported that recent data from Qatar suggested that a previous infection with one Omicron subvariant may confer protection against others.</p> <p>The agency said it had received reports of clusters of what it called recombinant variants, or variants that combined Delta and Omicron or different Omicron subvariants. But because such clusters have showed “very low to almost undetectable levels of transmission,” those variants have not been named.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Liberal cities target homeless camps
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/face-liberal-us-cities-target-homeless-camps-83382340
GIST	PORTLAND, Ore. -- Makeshift shelters abut busy roadways, tent cities line sidewalks, tarps cover broken-down cars, and sleeping bags are tucked in storefront doorways. The reality of the homelessness crisis in Oregon's largest city can't be denied.

“I would be an idiot to sit here and tell you that things are better today than they were five years ago with regard to homelessness,” Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler said recently. “People in this city aren’t stupid. They can open their eyes.”

As COVID-19 took root in the U.S., people on the street were largely left on their own — with many cities halting sweeps of homeless camps following guidance from federal health officials. The lack of remediation led to a situation that has spiraled out of control in many places, with frustrated residents calling for action as extreme forms of poverty play out on city streets.

Wheeler has now used emergency powers to ban camping along certain roadways and says homelessness is the “most important issue facing our community, bar none.”

Increasingly in liberal cities across the country — where people living in tents in public spaces have long been tolerated — leaders are removing encampments and pushing other strict measures to address homelessness that would have been unheard of a few years ago.

In Seattle, new Mayor Bruce Harrell ran on a platform that called for action on encampments, focusing on highly visible tent cities in his first few months in office. Across from City Hall, two blocks worth of tents and belongings were removed Wednesday. The clearing marked the end of a two and a half week standoff between the mayor and activists who occupied the camp, working in shifts to keep homeless people from being moved.

In Washington, D.C., Mayor Muriel Bowser launched a pilot program over the summer to permanently clear several homeless camps. In December, the initiative faced a critical test as lawmakers voted on a bill that would ban clearings until April. It failed 5-7.

In California, home to more than 160,000 homeless people, cities are reshaping how they address the crisis. The Los Angeles City Council used new laws to ban camping in 54 locations. LA Mayoral candidate Joe Buscaino has introduced plans for a ballot measure that would prohibit people from sleeping outdoors in public spaces if they have turned down offers of shelter.

San Francisco Mayor London Breed declared a state of emergency in December in the crime-heavy Tenderloin neighborhood, which has been ground zero for drug dealing, overdose deaths and homelessness. She said it’s time to get aggressive and “less tolerant of all the bull— that has destroyed our city.”

In Sacramento voters may decide on multiple proposed homeless-related ballot measures in November — including prohibiting people from storing “hazardous waste,” such as needles and feces, on public and private property, and requiring the city to create thousands of shelter beds. City officials in the area are feeling increasing pressure to break liberal conventions, including from an conservation group that is demanding that 750 people camping along a 23-mile (37-kilometer) natural corridor of the American River Parkway be removed from the area.

Advocates for the homeless have denounced aggressive measures, saying the problem is being treated as a blight or a chance for cheap political gains, instead of a humanitarian crisis.

Donald H. Whitehead Jr., executive director of the National Coalition for the Homeless, said at least 65 U.S. cities are criminalizing or sweeping encampments. “Everywhere that there is a high population of homeless people, we started to see this as their response.”

Portland’s homeless crisis has grown increasingly visible in recent years. During the area’s 2019 point-in-time count — a yearly census of sorts — an estimated 4,015 people were experiencing homelessness, with half of them “unsheltered” or sleeping outside. Advocates say the numbers have likely significantly increased.

Last month Wheeler used his emergency powers to ban camping on the sides of "high-crash" roadways — which encompass about 8% of the total area of the city. The decision followed a report showing 19 of 27 pedestrians killed by cars in Portland last year were homeless. People in at least 10 encampments were given 72 hours to leave.

"It's been made very clear people are dying," Wheeler said. "So I approach this from a sense of urgency."

Wheeler's top adviser — Sam Adams, a former Portland mayor — has also outlined a controversial plan that would force up to 3,000 homeless people into massive temporary shelters staffed by Oregon National Guard members. Advocates say the move, which marks a major shift in tone and policy, would ultimately criminalize homelessness.

"I understand my suggestions are big ideas," Adams wrote. "Our work so far, mine included, has ... failed to produce the sought-after results."

Oregon's Democratic governor rejected the idea. But Adams says if liberal cities don't take drastic action, ballot measures that crack down on homelessness may emerge instead.

That's what happened in left-leaning Austin, Texas. Last year voters there reinstated a ban that penalizes those who camp downtown and near the University of Texas, in addition to making it a crime to ask for money in certain areas and times.

People who work with the homeless urge mayors to find long-term solutions — such as permanent housing and addressing root causes like addiction and affordability — instead of temporary ones they say will further traumatize and villainize a vulnerable population.

The pandemic has added complications, with homeless-related complaints skyrocketing in places like Portland, where the number of campsites removed each week plummeted from 50 to five after COVID-19 hit.

The situation has affected businesses and events, with employers routinely asking officials to do more. Some are looking to move, while others already have — notably Oregon's largest annual golf tournament, the LPGA Tour's Portland Classic, relocated from Portland last year due to safety concerns related to a nearby homeless encampment.

James Darwin "Dar" Crammond, director at the Oregon Water Science Center building downtown, told the City Council about his experience working in an area populated with encampments.

Crammond said four years ago the biggest security concerns were vandalism and occasional car break-ins. Now employees often are confronted by "unhinged" people and forced to sidestep discarded needles, he said.

Despite spending \$300,000 on security and implementing a buddy system for workers to safely be outdoors, the division of the U.S. Geological Survey is looking to move.

"I don't blame the campers. There are a few other options for housing. There's a plague of meth and opiates and a world that offers them no hope and little assistance," Crammond said. "In my view, where the blame squarely lies is with the City of Portland."

In New York City, where a homeless man is accused of pushing a woman to her death in front of a subway in January, Mayor Eric Adams announced a plan to start barring people from sleeping on trains or riding the same lines all night.

Adams has likened homelessness to a "cancerous sore," lending to what advocates describe as a negative and inaccurate narrative that villainizes the population.

	<p>“Talk to someone on the street and literally just hear a little bit about their stories — I mean, honestly, homelessness can happen to any one of us,” said Laura Recko, associate director of external communications for Central City Concern in Portland.</p> <p>And some question whether the tougher approach is legal — citing the 2018 federal court decision known as <i>Martin v. City of Boise</i>, Idaho, that said cities cannot make it illegal for people to sleep or rest outside without providing sufficient indoor alternatives.</p> <p>Whitehead, of the National Coalition for the Homeless, thought the landmark ruling would force elected officials to start developing long-term fixes and creating enough shelter beds for emergency needs. Instead, some areas are ignoring the decision or finding ways around it, he said.</p> <p>“If cities become as creative about solutions as they are about criminalization, then we could end homelessness tomorrow,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 China eases control; ruble fall faster yuan
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/china-eases-control-ruble-fall-faster-yuan-83360995
GIST	<p>BEIJING -- China is easing government exchange rate controls to let the Russian ruble fall faster in value against the Chinese yuan to help insulate Beijing from economic sanctions on Moscow.</p> <p>The margin by which the ruble is allowed to fluctuate against the yuan in state-controlled daily trading will be doubled in size to 10% above or below the day's opening price starting Friday, the China Foreign Exchange Trade System announced.</p> <p>The ruble has lost about 40% of its value since Western governments cut off some Russia banks from the international SWIFT payment system in retaliation for President Vladimir Putin's Feb. 24 attack on Ukraine. Russia's central bank was blocked from using its foreign currency reserves to defend the exchange rate.</p> <p>China has avoided joining other governments in criticizing Putin's attack and has criticized Western sanctions. Chinese companies give no sign they are joining Western counterparts in pulling out of Russia, but economists say they are likely to try to take advantage of pressure on Moscow to try to strike better deals.</p> <p>Holding the exchange rate steady would require China's central bank to subsidize Russian buyers of Chinese goods by giving them more yuan for their rubles than market forces said Moscow's currency was worth.</p> <p>The latest change would allow Chinese exchange rates to keep up with the ruble's abrupt daily fluctuations.</p>
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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	03/10 Russia cutting itself from internet?
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/russia-may-be-cutting-itself-off-from-the-internet/
GIST	<p>Recently, Ukraine asked the official internet governing bodies for Russia to be booted off the net. The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and related organizations rejected Ukraine's request. But, that didn't stop major internet backbone providers, Lumen and Cogent, from cutting Russia from the world internet. It now appears, however, that Russia may sever its ties from the internet all on its own.</p>

[NEXTA](#), a free Belarusian news service based in Warsaw, Poland, released a purported Russian internet policy document. This stated that by Friday, March 11, all [Russian websites must be switched to the Russian Domain Name System \(DNS\) service](#).

DNS is the internet's master address list. It translates from human-readable internet addresses, such as [zdnet.com](#), to an Internet Protocol (IP) address. By forcing all Russian connections to use the Russian DNS zones, people in Russia could only reach sites recognized in the Russian DNS.

This isn't new. Russia has been trying for years to gain the power to unplug from the internet. This would make it trivial to block social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, and news sites including the New York Times, the BBC, and NEXTA. This would be all in a piece with [Russia shutting down effectively all independent Russian media](#). This would also make it easier for the Russian government to surveil its citizens.

For years, Russia's laws have required that all local Internet Service Providers [\(ISPs\) must route traffic through special servers managed by the Roskomnadzor](#), the country's telecoms regulator. These servers can act as kill switches and disconnect Russia from external connections while rerouting internet traffic inside Russia's own internet space. This Russian-only internet is called RuNet.

[Russia claims that RuNet has been tested and works](#). It's not clear, however, that Russia was successful. Russian ISPs have many connections to the outside world beyond the government-controlled switches.

However, if Russia's government is successful in forcing everyone to use its DNS, it's another story.

Andrew Sullivan, CEO and President of the [Internet Society](#), worries Russia may go even further. Sullivan believes Russia's government is "asking all sites to move to Russian-hosted servers and services." This will ensure that Russian "government websites can continue to operate should more companies decide to stop providing services."

Sullivan also notes that "Russia's government has been trying for years to disconnect from the global Internet, but they have been unsuccessful because their Internet infrastructure is actually quite robust."

If Russian dictator Vladimir Putin is successful, people in Russia will only get their information from state-sponsored propaganda. Sullivan believes "restricting Russia's Internet will have disproportionate impacts on ordinary citizens, cutting off the average person from the outside world while sparing elites ... who will always find the means to remain connected."

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HEADLINE	03/10 Cyber crooks posing as Ukraine fundraisers
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/cybercriminals-are-posing-as-ukraine-fundraisers-to-steal-cryptocurrency/
GIST	<p>Ukraine and charities supporting the nation have turned to soliciting cryptocurrency donations during Russia's invasion of the country. The gamble on virtual currencies worked: Within a week of launching wallets to receive donations directly, the Ukrainian government raised more than \$50 million worth of cryptocurrency.</p> <p>But the innovative means of fundraising have also introduced opportunities for cybercriminals to scam donors for a cut.</p> <p>Ukraine announced last week it would send free tokens of a new government-sponsored cryptocurrency as an incentive to donors. It ultimately scrapped the plans, but not before a group pretending to represent the country took advantage of the confusion to set up a token called "Peaceful World." The con had some success, said Tom Robinson co-founder and chief scientist at Elliptic, a cryptocurrency compliance company. The value of the coin skyrocketed to \$180 million within a week.</p>

Researchers at InfoBlox [observed purchases of another token](#), “SAVE UKRAINE,” through suspicious Ukraine-themed domains set up around the invasion, including one website meant to look like a decentralized anonymous organization (DAO) set up by Russian activists.

Donations scams have also run rampant on Twitter and Telegram, experts tell CyberScoop.

Robinson has seen more than a dozen scams on Twitter where [users pose as verified organizations to solicit donations to a specific crypto address](#). “It’s a very common type of crypto scam that has been repurposed to exploit Ukraine fundraising,” he said.

Telegram, a known hunting ground for cryptocurrency scammers, saw an uptick in accounts themed around Ukraine right before and after Russia invaded the country. Scammers were quick to take advantage, Brittany Allen, trust and safety architect at fraud protection company Sift, found.

Allen says the scams fall into three buckets: Users pretending to be in need of donations, users pretending to be companies collecting donations and offers to help others create fake donation websites.

One of the channels Allen observed, “Ukraine Support Donation,” tried to show its legitimacy by posting screenshots of emails from Coinbase noting new donations. (A CyberScoop review of the wallet addresses provided showed no transactions.) In another channel, a user posed as trading platform Binance collecting donations with the account “Binance Support.” Clicking on the account shows its actually registered as “Binancesuport” and is not the real company.

Cybercriminals aren’t limited to social media. Multiple firms have noticed an uptick in email scams where hackers pose as legit charities to solicit cash or bitcoin. Organizations scammers have impersonated include Act for Peace, UNICEF and Ukraine Crisis Relief Fund, [according to BitDefender](#). Security firm [Cofense found](#) one cryptocurrency donation scam targeting users with a spoofed email from the Ukraine Red Cross Society.

“So far, we’ve noticed that the attackers reacted very quickly to legitimate announcements of Ukraine and other organizations by mimicking the format of their messages,” Adrian Miron, antispam research manager at Bitdefender, said in a statement. “We expect the variety of phishing and malware campaigns, as well as the volume of messages sent daily, to increase steadily, and the attackers to adapt their persuasion methods accordingly.”

None of the wallet addresses affiliated with the scams provided by InfoBlox, Allen reviewed by CyberScoop appeared to have gained much success. Most of the wallets were empty, with the largest worth roughly \$4,000 worth of bitcoin. It’s unclear if donors sent that money.

Safeguarding against scammers

Experts say that the best way to prevent scams is vigilance by donors and companies whom fraudsters may be intimidating and to only trust verified organizations. Recovering stolen cryptocurrency is also much more difficult than money sent from a traditional financial institution, adding additional risks to donors sending cryptocurrency.

The uptick in scams could give pause for some organizations trying to jump on the cryptocurrency trend. “The more sophisticated the tactics that these legitimate groups use to try and fundraise, the more attack vectors open up,” said Robinson. “I think if the fundraising is just kept straightforward and simple, then that would minimize the potential for fraud.”

But Ukraine isn’t likely to back away from cryptocurrency donations anytime soon. After the canceled air drop, Ukraine’s vice minister last week announced that the country will instead roll out a non-fungible token (NFT). NFTs have been a popular target for cybercrime since the surge in popularity of the digital asset. Robinson says he’s watching for potential scams around a Ukraine NFT.

HEADLINE	03/10 Qakbot botnet getting more dangerous
SOURCE	https://threatpost.com/qakbot-botnet-sprouts-fangs-injects-malware-into-email-threads/178845/
GIST	<p>The Qakbot botnet is getting more dangerous, sinking its fangs into email threads and injecting malicious modules to pump up the core botnet's powers.</p> <p>On Thursday, Sophos published a deep dive into the botnet, describing how researchers have recently seen it spreading through email thread hijacking – an attack in which malware operators malspam replies to ongoing email threads.</p> <p>In a recent campaign, Qakbot has also been sucking up system info, Sophos said. “The botnet spreads through email thread hijacking and collects a wide range of profile information from newly infected machines, including all the configured user accounts and permissions, installed software, running services, and more,” according to the writeup, after which the botnet downloads the malicious modules.</p> <p>The Qakbot malware code uses weird encryption to cover up the contents of its communications, but Sophos researchers managed to decrypt the malicious modules and to decode the botnet's command and control C2) system to figure out interpret how Qakbot receives its marching orders.</p> <p>Beyond Annoying</p> <p>Qakbot, aka QBot, QuackBot and Pinkslipbot, is a banking trojan that was first spotted in the wild 17 years ago, in 2007. Since its toddler days, it's become one of the most prevalent banking trojans found around the world.</p> <p>Though its main purpose is info-swiping – e.g., ripping off logins, passwords and more – the malware has picked up myriad other nasty habits: spying on financial operations, spreading and installing ransomware, keystroke logging, a backdoor functionality, and smooth moves to evade detection, including detecting its environment, self-updating, and cyptor/packer updates. It also fights back against being analyzed and debugged, be it by experts or automated tools.</p> <p>“Qakbot is a modular, multi-purpose botnet spread by email that has become increasingly popular with attackers as a malware delivery network, like Trickbot and Emotet,” said Andrew Brandt, principal threat researcher at Sophos.</p> <p>“Sophos' deep analysis of Qakbot reveals the capture of detailed victim profile data, the botnet's ability to process complex sequences of commands, and a series of payloads to extend the functionality of the core botnet engine.”</p> <p>In a nutshell, Qakbot isn't your dad's commodity bot, Brandt said: “The days of thinking of ‘commodity’ bots as merely annoying are long gone.”</p> <p>Infection Chain and Payloads</p> <p>Sophos analyzed a campaign in which the Qakbot botnet inserted malicious messages into existing email threads: messages that included a short sentence and a link to download a zip file containing a malicious Excel spreadsheet. The message asked the targeted user to “enable content” to activate the infection chain.</p> <p>Once the botnet infected a target, it scanned them in order to get a detailed profile that it then passed on up to the C2 server. Then, the botnet downloaded more – at least three – malicious modules.</p> <p>The payloads, which were injected into browsers, took the form of dynamic link libraries (DLL) that broadened the botnet's capabilities to include these unsavory tidbits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A module that injects password-stealing code into webpages, • A module that performs network scans, collecting data about other machines in proximity to the infected computer, and • A module that identified the addresses of a dozen SMTP (Simple Mail Transfer Protocol) email servers and then tried to connect to each one and send spam.

Qak Off, Qakbot

Brandt recommended that security teams need to take Qakbot infections seriously, by investigating every infection and scrubbing networks clean of “every trace” of the multi-talented malware. Botnet infections are, after all, a known precursor for a ransomware attack, Brandt wrote.

It’s not just ransomware that sys admins have to brace for. There’s also the prospect of botnet developers selling or leasing their access to your breached network, Brandt warned. “For example, Sophos has encountered Qakbot samples that deliver [Cobalt Strike](#) beacons directly to an infected host,” he said. “Once the Qakbot operators have used the infected computer they can transfer, lease out or sell access to these beacons to paying customers.”

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HEADLINE	03/10 MuddyWater targets Turkey; deploy RATs
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/03/iranian-hackers-targeting-turkey-and.html
GIST	<p>The Iranian state-sponsored threat actor known as MuddyWater has been attributed to a new swarm of attacks targeting Turkey and the Arabian Peninsula with the goal of deploying remote access trojans (RATs) on compromised systems.</p> <p>"The MuddyWater supergroup is highly motivated and can use unauthorized access to conduct espionage, intellectual property theft, and deploy ransomware and destructive malware in an enterprise," Cisco Talos researchers Asheer Malhotra, Vitor Ventura, and Arnaud Zobec said in a report published today.</p> <p>The group, which has been active since at least 2017, is known for its attacks on various sectors that help further advance Iran's geopolitical and national security objectives. In January 2022, the U.S. Cyber Command attributed the actor to the country's Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS).</p> <p>MuddyWater is also believed to be a "conglomerate of multiple teams operating independently rather than a single threat actor group," the cybersecurity firm added, making it an umbrella actor in the vein of Winnti, a China-based advanced persistent threat (APT).</p> <p>The latest campaigns undertaken by the hacking crew involve the use of malware-laced documents delivered via phishing messages to deploy a remote access trojan called SloughRAT (aka Canopy by CISA) capable of executing arbitrary code and commands received from its command-and-control (C2) servers.</p> <p>The maldoc, an Excel file containing a malicious macro, triggers the infection chain to drop two Windows Script Files (.WSF) on the endpoint, the first one of them acting as the instrumentor to invoke and execute the next-stage payload.</p> <p>Also discovered are two additional script-based implants, one written in Visual Basic and the other coded in JavaScript, both of which are engineered to download and run malicious commands on the compromised host.</p> <p>Furthermore, the latest set of intrusions marks a continuation of a November 2021 campaign that struck Turkish private organizations and governmental institutions with PowerShell-based backdoors to gather information from its victims, even as it exhibits overlaps with another campaign that took place in March 2021.</p> <p>The commonalities in tactics and techniques adopted by the operators have raised the possibility that these attacks are "distinct, yet related, clusters of activity," with the campaigns leveraging a "broader TTP-sharing paradigm, typical of coordinated operational teams," the researchers noted.</p> <p>In a second partial attack sequence observed by Cisco Talos between December 2021 and January 2022, the adversary set up scheduled tasks to retrieve VBS-based malicious downloaders, which enable the</p>

	<p>execution of payloads retrieved from a remote server. The results of the command are subsequently exfiltrated back to the C2 server.</p> <p>"While they share certain techniques, these campaigns also denote individuality in the way they were conducted, indicating the existence of multiple sub-teams beneath the Muddywater umbrella — all sharing a pool of tactics and tools to pick and choose from," the researchers concluded.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 NSA director: Russia cyber threat remains
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/threat-intelligence/nsa-director-limited-russia-cyberattacks-so-far-but-threat-remains
GIST	<p>NSA Director and Commander of Cyber Command Paul Nakasone told lawmakers Thursday that he does not believe the threat of cyberwarfare in Russia's invasion of Ukraine has passed despite its very muted presence thus far.</p> <p>Nakasone said they had seen "three or four" cyberattacks so far.</p> <p>"We remain vigilant," he told a Senate hearing. "We're 15 days into this conflict. By no means are we sitting back and taking this casually, we are watching every single day for any type of unusual activity."</p> <p>Though there have been no official attributions, external observers have noted two rounds of denial of services paired with text message spam meant to sow distrust in banks, three different forms of wiper malware used in limited attacks in Ukraine, and an attack on Viasat service in Europe causing outages and damaging equipment. Viasat is believed to be used by the Ukrainian military.</p> <p>Though none of these attacks have been formally attributed to Russia, all have suspected links to the invasion due to timing and targeting.</p> <p>While that is the presence of cyberwarfare, it is nowhere near the destructive capability Russia has demonstrated against Ukraine in even the last few years. In 2015 and 2016, Russia caused power outages in Ukraine. In 2017, it launched the NotPetya wiper causing billions of dollars globally in spillover damage after it overflowed from its Ukrainian targets.</p> <p>Nakasone outlined four types of attacks of concern: An attack causing spillover like NotPetya, weaponizing ransomware attacks, the use of proxy groups, or a significant targeted attack on Eastern Europe.</p> <p>While Russia has been relatively silent in the cyberwar space, Ukraine has launched its own cyber operations against Russia using a volunteer force, targeting a mix of business and government.</p> <p>He detailed a varied list of why the worst fears of Russian cyberwar didn't come to fruition.</p> <p>"This is part of Russians own strategic calculus," he said. "But secondly, a tremendous amount of work was done prior to the actual invasion by my agency, work that was done by Cyber Command, by interagency, by a series of private sector partners that hardened the infrastructure of the Ukraine," he said.</p> <p>Finally, he said, "there have been actions taken since then that I think have contributed to the Russians in terms of the way that they approach the future." He did not elaborate on what those actions were.</p> <p>"Not only are we vigilant, we're prepared and most important, we're sharing information and sharing our expertise with our partners," said Nakasone.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Malware as security tool targets Ukraine IT
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SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/malware-disguised-as-security-tool-targets-ukraines-it-army/
GIST	<p>A new malware campaign is taking advantage of people's willingness to support Ukraine's cyber warfare against Russia to infect them with password-stealing Trojans.</p> <p>Last month, the Ukrainian government announced a new IT Army composed of volunteers worldwide who conduct cyberattacks and DDoS attacks against Russian entities.</p> <p>This initiative has led to a outpouring of support by many people worldwide who have been helping target Russian organizations and sites, even if that activity is considered illegal.</p> <p>Mimicking a real DDoS tool</p> <p>As is common with malware distributors, threat actors are taking advantage of the IT Army by promoting a fake DDoS tool on Telegram that installs a password and information-stealing trojan.</p> <p>In a new report by Cisco Talos, researchers warn that threat actors are mimicing a DDoS tool called the “Liberator”, which is a website bomber for use against Russian propaganda outlets.</p> <p>While the versions downloaded from the real site are “clean”, and likely illegal to use, those circulated in Telegram hide malware payloads, and there’s no way to tell the difference before executing them as neither is digitally signed.</p> <p>The Telegram posts claim that the tool fetches a list of Russian targets to attack from a server, so the user doesn’t need to do much other than execute it on their machine.</p> <p>This ease of use is likely to appeal to Ukraine supporters who are not very technical and do not know how to conduct their own attacks to “bomb” Russian sites.</p> <p>The infostealer</p> <p>The malware that’s dropped on the victims’ systems performs anti-debug checks before it executes and then follows a process injection step to load the Phoenix information stealer in memory.</p> <p>Phoenix was first spotted in the summer of 2019, sold in the cybercrime underground as MaaS (malware as a service) for \$15/month or \$80 for a lifetime subscription.</p> <p>The particular info-stealer can gather data from web browsers, VPN tools, Discord, filesystem locations, and cryptocurrency wallets, and send them to a remote address, in this case, a Russian IP.</p> <p>Talos researchers found that this particular IP has been distributing Phoenix since November 2021. Hence, the recent theme change indicates this campaign is just an opportunistic attempt to exploit the war in Ukraine for financial profit.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 ‘Zhadnost’ behind Ukraine DDoS attacks?
SOURCE	https://lifers.com/2022/03/securityscorecard-discovers-new-botnet-zhadnost-responsible-for-ukraine-ddos-attacks/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Executive Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SecurityScorecard (SSC) has identified three separate DDoS attacks which all targeted Ukrainian government and financial websites leading up to and during Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Details of these DDoS attacks have not yet been publicly identified. SSC discovered a botnet of more than 3,000 unique IP addresses, across multiple countries and continents, that were the source of the DDoS attacks which consisted of HTTP floods and DNS amplification. SSC has named this botnet “Zhadnost” – Russian for “Greed.” Most Zhadnost bots are routers, the majority of them MikroTik, with misconfigured DNS recursion settings and other known vulnerabilities.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The DDoS attacks appeared to have had a minimal, temporary impact on their targets. Government websites and banking services were quickly restored and customers' balances were not affected. • We assess that the IP addresses used in the first DDoS attack were a combination of Zhadnost bots and other botnets possibly controlled by criminal actors, who partnered with or were hired by the same threat actor. The second and third DDoS attacks used only Zhadnost bots. • Attributing Zhadnost and the DDoS attacks to any one threat actor is difficult, however, we assess with moderate confidence that Russia, or Russian-aligned actors, are likely behind this DDoS campaign.
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HEADLINE	03/10 Russia creates own TLS certificate authority
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/russia-creates-its-own-tls-certificate-authority-to-bypass-sanctions/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Russia has created its own trusted TLS certificate authority (CA) to solve website access problems that have been piling up after sanctions prevent certificate renewals.</p> <p>The sanctions imposed by western companies and governments are preventing Russian sites from renewing existing TLS certificates, causing browsers to block access to sites with expired certificates.</p> <p>TLS certificates help the web browser confirm that a domain belongs to a verified entity and that the exchange of information between the user and the server is encrypted.</p> <p>Signing authorities based on countries that have imposed sanctions on Russia can no longer accept payments for their services, leaving many sites with no practical means to renew expiring certificates.</p> <p>After a certificate expires, web browsers such as Google Chrome, Safari, Microsoft Edge, and Mozilla Firefox will display full-page warnings that the pages are insecure, which can drive many users away from the site.</p> <p>A domestic authority</p> <p>The Russian state has envisioned a solution in a domestic certificate authority for the independent issuing and renewal of TLS certificates.</p> <p>“It will replace the foreign security certificate if it is revoked or expires. The Ministry of Digital Development will provide a free domestic analogue. The service is provided to legal entities – site owners upon request within 5 working days,” explains the Russian public services portal, Gosuslugi (translated).</p> <p>However, for new Certificate Authorities (CA) to be trusted by web browsers, they first needed to be vetted by various companies, which can take a long time.</p> <p>Currently, the only web browsers that recognize Russia’s new CA as trustworthy are the Russia-based Yandex browser and Atom products, so Russian users are told to use these instead of Chrome, Firefox, Edge, etc.</p> <p>Sites that have already received and are currently using these state-supplied certificates include Sberbank, VTB, and the Russian Central Bank.</p> <p>Notice sent to owners of eligible websites</p> <p>Russian media has also been circulating a list with 198 domains that reportedly received a notice to use the domestic TLS certificate, but for now, its use hasn’t been made mandatory.</p> <p>A problematic proposal</p> <p>Users of other browsers like Chrome or Firefox can manually add the new Russian root certificate to continue using Russian sites that feature the state-issued certificate.</p>

	<p>However, this raises the concerns that Russia could abuse their CA root certificate to perform HTTPS traffic interception and man-in-the-middle attacks.</p> <p>This abuse would ultimately lead leading to the new root certificate being added to the certificate revocation list (CRL).</p> <p>This would render these domestic certificates invalid, and Chrome, Edge, and Firefox would block access to any websites using them.</p> <p>Certificate authorities are supposed to be universally trusted. However, as Russia is not currently enjoying any level of trust, it is unlikely for the major browser vendors to add them to their root certificate stores.</p> <p>Russia has taken some drastic measures to lessen the impact of western sanctions on its economy. Many have presumed that the time to cut ties with the global internet and push its netizens to the “Runet” has come.</p> <p>In response to these rumors, the Russian Ministry for Digital Technologies flatly denied that there’s a plan to switch off the internet from inside in a statement shared with local news outlets.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Corporate contact forms to spread malware
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/corporate-website-contact-forms-used-to-spread-bazarbackdoor-malware/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>The stealthy BazarBackdoor malware is now being spread via website contact forms rather than typical phishing emails to evade detection by security software.</p> <p>BazarBackdoor is a stealthy backdoor malware created by the TrickBot group and is now under development by the Conti ransomware operation. This malware provides threat actors remote access to an internal device that can be used as a launchpad for further lateral movement within a network.</p> <p>The BazarBackdoor malware is usually spread through phishing emails that include malicious documents that download and install the malware.</p> <p>However, as secure email gateways have become better at detecting these malware droppers, distributors are moving to new ways of spreading the malware.</p> <p>Contact forms replacing emails</p> <p>In a new report by Abnormal Security, analysts explain that a new distribution campaign started in December 2021 targets corporate victims with BazarBackdoor, with the likely goal of deploying Cobalt Strike or ransomware payloads.</p> <p>Instead of sending phishing emails to the targets, the threat actors first use corporate contact forms to initiate communication.</p> <p>For example, in one of the cases seen by Abnormal's analysts, the threat actors posed as employees at a Canadian construction company who submitted a request for a product supply quote.</p> <p>After the employee responds to the phishing email, the attackers send back a malicious ISO file supposedly relevant to the negotiation.</p> <p>Since sending these files directly is impossible or would trigger security alerts, the threat actors use file-sharing services like TransferNow and WeTransfer...</p>

	<p>We reported a similar case of contact form abuse in August, where fake DMCA infringement notices sent via contact forms were installing BazarBackdoor.</p> <p>In April 2021, we also reported on a phishing campaign using contact forms to spread the IcedID banking trojan and Cobalt Strike beacons.</p> <p>Hiding BazarLoader</p> <p>The ISO archive attachment contains a .lnk file and a .log file. The idea here is to evade AV detection by packing the payloads in the archive and having the user manually extract them after download.</p> <p>The .lnk file contains a command instruction that opens a terminal window using existing Windows binaries and loads the .log file, which is, in reality, a BazarBackdoor DLL.</p> <p>When the backdoor is loaded, it will be injected into the svchost.exe process and contact the command and control (C2) server to receive commands to execute.</p> <p>Due to many of the C2 IPs being offline at the time of Abnormal's analysis, the researchers couldn't retrieve the second-stage payload, so the ultimate goal of this campaign remains unknown.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Russia censorship agency data breach?
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/xgdmj7/russian-censorship-roskomnadzor-hacked-leak-distributed-denial-of-secrets
GIST	<p>Transparency organization Distributed Denial of Secrets has released what it says is 800GB of data from a section of Roskomnadzor, the Russian government body responsible for censorship in the country.</p> <p>On Distributed Denial of Secrets' website, the organization describes the data as coming from a hack and says that Anonymous claimed responsibility. Roskomnadzor is the agency that has in recent days announced a block of Facebook and other websites in the country as the war in Ukraine intensifies.</p> <p>Specifically, Distributed Denial of Secrets says the data comes from the Roskomnadzor of the Republic of Bashkortostan. The Republic of Bashkortostan is in the west of the country.</p> <p>Motherboard found references to the Republic of Bashkortostan in some of the released files.</p> <p>"Appears genuine but I cannot vouch all of them of course," Andrei Soldatov, a Russian journalist who has extensively covered Russia's censorship apparatus, told Motherboard in an online message after reviewing a small subsection of the files. "Right now I don't see anything really surprising."</p> <p>The data is split into two main categories: a series of over 360,000 files totalling in at 526.9GB and which date up to as recently as March 5, and then two databases that are 290.6GB in size, according to Distributed Denial of Secrets' website.</p> <p>"We will soon be releasing the raw data while we look for solutions to extracting the data. One appears to be a legal research database that was, according to the file timestamp, last modified in 2020. The other appears to be a database for HR procedures," Distributed Denial of Secrets wrote on its website.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Facial recognition to ID Russia soldiers
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/facial-recognition-identify-russian-soldiers/
GIST	<p>ON MARCH 1, Chechnya's leader, Ramzan Kadyrov, posted a short video on Telegram in which a cheery bearded soldier stood before a line of tanks clanking down a road under an overcast sky. In an accompanying post, Kadyrov assured Ukrainians that the Russian army doesn't hurt civilians and that Vladimir Putin wants their country to determine its own fate.</p>

In France, the CEO of a law enforcement and military training company called Tactical Systems took a screenshot of the soldier's face and got to work. Within about an hour, using face recognition services available to anyone online, [he identified](#) that the soldier was likely Hussein Mezhidov, a Chechen commander close to Kadyrov involved in Russia's assault on Ukraine, and found his Instagram account.

"Just having access to a computer and internet, you can basically be like an intelligence agency from a film," says the CEO, who asked to be identified as YC to avoid potential repercussions for his sleuthing. Tactical Systems' client list includes [the French armed forces](#), and it offers training in open source intelligence gathering.

Russia's assault on Ukraine, a conflict between two internet-savvy nations in a region with good cellular coverage, offers rich pickings for open source intelligence, or OSINT. Compiling and cross-referencing social media posts and other public sources can reveal information such as the locations or losses of military units. The abundant online photos that are the legacy of years of social networking and a handful of services that provide easy access to face recognition algorithms allow some startling feats of armchair analysis.

Not long ago, a commander or prisoner of war pictured in a news report might be recognizable only to military and intelligence analysts or the individual's own colleagues, friends, and family. Today a stranger on the other side of the globe can use a screenshot of a person's face to track down their name and family photos—or those of a look-alike.

WIRED used a free trial of a Russian service called FindClone to trace a photo of a man that a Ukrainian government advisor claimed was a captured Russian soldier. It took less than five minutes to find a matching social media profile. The profile, on Russian social network VKontakte, included the teenager's birthdate and photos of his family. It listed his place of work as "polite people/war." The Russian phrase "polite people" is used to refer to soldiers from Russia active in Ukraine during the 2014 annexation of Crimea. Ukrainian open source intelligence group InformNapalm independently made the same connection in an earlier [post](#) claiming to identify two of the claimed captives and confirmed in a message to WIRED that it had relied in part on face recognition.

That power to identify people from afar could bring new accountability to armed conflict but also open new avenues for digital attack. Identifying—or misidentifying—people in videos or photos said to be from the front lines could expose them or their families to online harassment or worse. [Face algorithms can be wrong](#), and errors are more common on photos without a clear view of a person's face, as is often the case for wartime images. Nonetheless, Ukraine has a [volunteer "IT Army"](#) of computer experts hacking Russian targets on the country's behalf.

If distant volunteers can identify combatants using face recognition, government agencies can do the same or much more. "I'm sure there are Russian analysts tracking Twitter and TikTok with access to similar if not more powerful technology who are not sharing what or who they find so openly," says Ryan Fedasiuk, an adjunct fellow at the Center for a New American Security.

Even amateur investigators can access multiple face recognition services. Some can search across millions of faces found online in a way similar to [controversial US startup Clearview](#), which markets primarily to law enforcement. To identify the bearded Chechen soldier, YC of Tactical Systems first used FindClone, which searches across photos sourced from VKontakte. The results led to a photo of the soldier clasping hands with Kadyrov. An [openly accessible demo](#) of a Microsoft service that compares faces in two photos, marketed for uses like checking IDs, also judged that the photos showed the same person.

A face search engine called PimEyes, which was founded in Poland and [once claimed](#) to have compiled 900 million faces, turned up more photos. One pointed to an Instagram account with a photo that revealed Hussein Mezhidov's name. Searches using that name returned articles describing him as a commander and special forces trainer, as well as a YouTube video apparently shot in Ukraine in which he pulled the national flag down from a government building.

Tactical Systems' [Twitter thread recounting that investigation](#) spread quickly. Its CEO says he hopes to inspire others to develop open source intelligence skills that can help hold combatants in Ukraine or other conflicts to account. "The more these individuals are publicly identified and know that the OSINT community is following their movements, the less chance they will commit war crimes," he says. Microsoft, PimEyes, and FindClone did not reply to requests for comment.

Face recognition can also be used to debunk identification claims. Last weekend, Tactical Systems and high-profile open source intelligence group Bellingcat both turned to Microsoft's face verification service after reports, [including from](#) Ukrainian newspaper *Ukrayinska Pravda*, that the bandaged face of a man said to be a Russian pilot shot down in Ukraine matched that of a pilot pictured alongside Vladimir Putin in a [2017 news photo](#) from Syria. Microsoft's algorithms spat out a low score and said the faces did not match.

Bellingcat includes advice on the use of face recognition tools in its [guides to open source intelligence](#). The group credited FindClone in a [2019 report](#) that identified several people alleged to have been involved in shooting down a Malaysian Airlines flight over eastern Ukraine in 2014. Dutch investigators concluded that the flight was downed by a Russian missile, but the country's government denied involvement.

Posts that cite face recognition to back up claims about people on the frontlines in Ukraine have for the most part generated a positive reaction on social media—in contrast to the typical response to revelations about police or government use of face recognition.

Jameson Spivack, an associate at Georgetown's Center on Privacy & Technology, says some of the same concerns about government uses of the technology also apply when it's being used for identifications in war-torn Ukraine.

One is that face recognition performs unreliably on images that don't capture people head-on, a limitation for both police detectives and those sourcing images from war zones. Another is the potential unintended consequences of correct or incorrect identifications. "Individuals using the technology don't have the power of the state behind them like law enforcement, but the internet can put the collective power of the mob behind them," Spivack says.

YC of Tactical Systems agrees. He says that he always takes care to back up algorithms' assessments with other visual clues or contextual information. In the case of the bearded Chechen, a distinctive notch in the man's beard helped confirm some matches. "Humans are needed, too," he says.

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HEADLINE	03/10 Cyber expert: US not ready Russia attack
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/mar/10/us-russia-cyber-attack-prepared
GIST	<p>The war between Russia and Ukraine has been widely anticipated to play out online, in addition to on the ground.</p> <p>Moscow's cyberwar capabilities have long been cause for concern. Russia has a record of coordinating cyber-attacks on the US, Ukraine, and other adversaries. And the country has established itself in recent years as an international hub for cybercrime.</p> <p>Russia's past has raised fears of a large scale cyberwar effort targeting Ukraine and its allies, including the US. While the Biden administration has reportedly played out potential responses to cyber warfare, some experts have argued that the US is not well prepared for a significant cyber-attack.</p> <p>We spoke with Glenn S Gerstell, a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the former general counsel of the National Security Agency, about the likelihood of serious cyber warfare – and whether the US is prepared to respond.</p> <p>"If we had approached this correctly 20 years ago, we would be largely invulnerable to cyber-attacks," he said. "But unfortunately that is not the case."</p>

What kinds of attacks have we seen thus far in the conflict, and what are we still on the lookout for?
We're seeing a [relentless series of attacks](#) against Ukrainian websites, especially those that are government linked and government controlled. That's part of a pattern we have seen for the past eight years in which Russia has regarded Ukraine as its sort of cyber punching bag.

What we have not yet seen are completely destructive attacks on the infrastructure in Ukraine, such as the ones [we saw in 2015 and 2016](#) when Russia seemingly shut down the electric grid.

Why is a Russian cyber-attack against Ukraine or its allies so widely anticipated?

Russia has used its very formidable cyber skills against the US and other countries in the past – we have seen what it can do in the form of [SolarWinds](#), the [Colonial Pipeline hack](#), and [scores of ransomware attacks](#) in every industry in the United States.

So we know they are a sophisticated cyber adversary, we know they have a motive to do so – they'd like to throw sand in our gears to disrupt things here and achieve a strategic advantage in the conflict. But whether Vladimir Putin would take the risk of actively engaging in destructive cyber warfare is another matter.

What would happen if Russia were to attack the US and how likely is such an attack?

I do not see Russia turning off the lights in the United States, for a number of reasons: many people in the US have taken the position that a cyber-attack with real-world destructive effects is the same as a missile attack or bomb, and therefore would be viewed as an act of war.

In that case, there is no upside for Putin, because he knows it would trigger a very unclear set of escalations and retaliations. It's not going to achieve a strategic objective, and may end up very badly, making Russia net worse off.

Does the US have a set response to a cyber act of war, like it would for a physical act of war?

The US could respond in a number of ways: with a stealth cyber-attack on Russian agencies or a more visible cyber-attack the US openly admits to carrying out.

We could also carry out a military action, in response to a cyber-attack and do something physical. There is, of course also a range of economic sanctions the US could take against Russia, it could remove diplomats – the response is quite fluid.

How prepared is the US to respond to a cyber-attack from Russia?

We're prepared to respond in the sense that our military has an extraordinary offensive capability to respond on a cyber level – but we are not ready to defend as a country.

The private sector is not prepared for attacks. It has relied on buggy software to protect itself, and cyberthreats are growing faster than our ability to adapt to them. We need to impose some kind of mandatory solution, because the pure market solution isn't viable.

The US has been reactive and side-stepped cyber responsibility by simply grafting it on to existing government agencies, making each agency responsible for its own area.

Everything from hospitals to bridges to roads and tunnels are relevant to national security, so we need government action to address it with a centralized solution – our national wellbeing depends on it.

Could you explain bit further how non-governmental entities are vulnerable to hacks, and what effects that could have?

The Biden administration is doing its best to shore up the private sector's cyberdefenses, but it's vulnerable – from banks to hospitals, from giant public companies to smaller privately owned ones.

Whether Putin would take the risk of a seriously destructive attack on hospitals or water systems or chemical plants is the big question. Logic would tell you that it's not worth the risk of our retaliation and has little upside for him. But if he's cornered or feels he doesn't have much more to lose, who knows?

Where does the international community stand on cyber-attacks?

When a bomb lands on a sovereign territory, it causes real-world injuries and damage, and we typically know exactly where it launched from and how to respond.

But with cyber-attacks, this is not the case. The internet is not constrained by sovereign boundaries. Sometimes hacks are destructive while other times an adversary simply enters a network and violates privacy, stealing secrets and data without causing physical harm.

There is, however, a rough consensus that if a cyber act produces a real world harm such as injuring people or causing physical damage, it would be treated as an equivalent to a physical attack by a bomb or missile. This is to say it could be viewed as an act of war and trigger under international law the right to retaliate physically.

Why haven't we seen such a giant destructive hack yet, and could that change?

We surely cannot rule it out, but I think we have not experienced it yet for a number of reasons: partly because Ukrainians have been more successful when defending and securing their network, or that Russia has made a strategic decision not to destroy the economy of a country that they hoped to soon occupy.

In terms of attacks on the US, Putin knows if he were to authorize a destructive hack he would be met with a very strong response. It raises the stakes of our military retaliation, which is not good for him. He is likely making a strategic calculation that nobody can really understand unless you are in Putin's mind.

However, it is entirely possible that if we get to a situation where Putin is cornered or feels that he's going to not succeed, he might act irrationally.

The calculus may change as Russia reasons that they are already bombing civilians, they are already infuriating the international community. Why not turn off the electric grid? We cannot rule that out.

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HEADLINE	03/10 Pro-Russia rebels use Facebook to recruit
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/10/russia-rebels-sanctions-facebook/
GIST	<p>In the days after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Aleksandr Zaldostanov, the leader of a pro-Putin biker gang, the Night Wolves, turned to Facebook to disparage the Ukrainian president and push falsehoods about the war.</p> <p>"Ukraine is a torn off piece of Russia, which is shrinking in pain and bleeding still," he posted on March 1 to more than 18,000 followers. "Russia did not start a war now!!!! Those who divided us started it!"</p> <p>A former physician known by his nickname, "the Surgeon," Zaldostanov has been on the U.S. government sanctions list since 2014, amid allegations that he helped Russian troops confiscate weapons during the country's invasion of Crimea.</p> <p>The sanctions block Zaldostanov's assets and generally prohibit U.S. citizens from "dealing" with him, but on Facebook he maintains a very active account, posting frequent support of Russia since the invasion.</p> <p>The multitude of sanctioned entities and individuals who, like Zaldostanov, maintain a robust Facebook and Instagram presence is the subject of a pair of new whistleblower complaints, filed in December and February, arguing that Facebook parent company Meta engaged in "reckless or willful" violations of U.S. sanctions law by permitting the accounts, according to redacted copies reviewed exclusively by The Washington Post.</p>

The existence of these accounts, the filings allege, allowed the users to cultivate global legitimacy and spread Russian propaganda. The complaints identify other posts appearing to recruit fighters and solicit funds to back pro-Russian separatists, which some legal experts suggest could violate U.S. sanctions laws, as well as Facebook's rules. One post from a pro-Russian rebel called for volunteers with experience "in combat and armed conflicts." Another video sought donations for separatist forces to pay for "equipment for soldiers on the front." (The Post independently viewed this content on Facebook on Tuesday.)

The complaints were made to the Justice Department and the Treasury Department by Whistleblower Aid, a nonprofit organization representing Joohn Choe, a Facebook contractor hired to study extremism on the platforms after the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol. A parallel complaint filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission argues that the company misled investors. Choe is seeking whistleblower protections from the SEC.

In an interview with The Post, Choe said he decided to go public with the complaints after Russia's invasion into Ukraine, driven by concerns that the Facebook accounts helped Russian President Vladimir Putin create a narrative to justify the war.

"Facebook is knowingly aiding and abetting in the information war that Russia is waging," Choe said. The social media posts "[legitimize] the pretextual basis of this war."

Although posts raising money for militias would appear to violate Facebook's terms of service, the bulk of Choe's complaints collide with a murky area of the law. Experts say there's been little government action to clarify whether social media companies have a legal obligation to remove accounts and posts from many individuals and organizations under sanctions. Limiting the communications of people who are subject to sanctions could violate laws intended to protect free speech.

These legal questions have taken on greater urgency as the U.S. government leverages unprecedented sanctions to punish Russia for its aggression in Ukraine. The whistleblower complaints have the potential to force the U.S. government to clarify its positions, said Scott Anderson, a sanctions expert with the nonpartisan Brookings Institution.

Meta says that it adheres to sanctions and that prohibitions vary considerably depending on the type of sanction a government imposes. The company says the sanctions are often targeted in nature and don't always prohibit a person from having a presence on its platform.

"This allegation is untrue — we are committed to complying with U.S. sanctions laws and are treating these individuals and entities as we're required to under U.S. law," said Meta spokeswoman Dani Lever.

Many sanctions laws have historically exempted the sharing of information as an activity that is subject to sanctions, and so far, tech companies have resisted calls for them to crack down on certain figures: Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei of Iran are both on government sanctions lists, yet maintain active social media presences across online services.

U.S. companies cannot provide assistance or services to sanctioned entities, but the government has made broad exceptions for media and communications because the U.S. government does not want to be perceived as suppressing free speech, Anderson said. The exception, known as the Berman amendment, dates to the 1980s, when the United States seized magazines and books from embargoed countries that were subject to sanctions.

Internally, Facebook executives have debated how they should apply sanctions laws to their services, according to three people familiar with the discussions, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe sensitive matters. Executives at the company have pressed the State Department for more clarity in recent years about how social networks should enforce sanctions on their platforms.

"Congress needs to address this and should more clearly specify, across sanctions regimes, what is required of social media. The ambiguity is unsustainable," said Brian Fishman, a senior fellow at New

America, a think tank, and Facebook's former director of counterterrorism, dangerous organizations and content policy. Fishman said he had no specific knowledge of the whistleblower's allegations but worked on issues related to sanctioned individuals and groups while at the company.

In the complaints, Choe's lawyers called the agencies to investigate whether the company should be fined for sanctions violations, which the legal team argues could amount to tens of millions of dollars. By filing with the SEC whistleblower program, Choe could be entitled to a monetary reward.

"This isn't just morally wrong, it's illegal. This isn't even a close call," said John Tye, the founder of Whistleblower Aid and Choe's lawyer, who worked on U.S. sanctions regimes during the Obama administration. Tye said that based on his experience at the State Department, the posts and accounts identified would not be subject to exemptions under the Berman amendment.

Whistleblower Aid is the same nonprofit organization that represented [former Facebook product manager](#) Frances Haugen in her disclosures to the SEC, which argued that Facebook misled investors about the extent of [coronavirus](#) misinformation, extremism and human trafficking on the platform.

Choe's complaints identify Instagram and Facebook pages linked to Denis Pushilin and Leonid Pasechnik, Russian-backed leaders of separatist enclaves in eastern Ukraine, both on the U.S. sanctions lists for years. The Treasury Department accused Pushilin of overseeing uprisings across the eastern region of Ukraine and accused Pasechnik of smuggling arms and other contraband to Russia.

Both men played a central role in Putin's justification for his invasion of Ukraine. The Russian president claimed he was [deploying "peacekeeping" forces](#) as he recognized the independence of these separatist regions, known as the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics.

Zaldostanov, Pushilin and Pasechnik did not respond to requests for comment through their social media accounts. Pasechnik has [publicly said](#) he is not deterred by economic sanctions and has vowed to overcome them. The Treasury Department, the Justice Department and the SEC did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Choe began warning Facebook officials of groups under sanctions that were using the platforms in August 2021, according to emails reviewed by The Post. He compiled a report, called "Project Denim," outlining how the Belarusian regime surveilled people's Facebook posts, using interactions such as "likes" as evidence of "extremism" to arrest critics of the government. The report documented Belarusian secret police operating a network through Facebook and Instagram to coordinate arrests and intimidate activists.

In that document, Choe identified Facebook and Instagram accounts linked to GUBOPiK, a sanctioned Belarusian state security service that has been accused of political repression. The report also included links to Facebook posts from Aleh Haidukevich, a Belarusian member of parliament who was put on the [U.S. sanctions list](#) after defending [the forced 2021 diversion](#) of a commercial flight to detain a journalist. In one August post mentioned in the complaint, Haidukevich appears to be defending a [2021 crisis](#) at the Belarus-E.U. border, saying that Belarusian border guards found a man "beaten half to death."

Choe sent the report to his project supervisors at Facebook in early August, according to emails reviewed by The Post, and later that month escalated his findings in emails to Facebook officials including Miranda Sissons, Facebook's director of human rights.

"Yes, Belarus is indeed a highly repressive government," Sissons wrote in an email. "It's a very complex deck."

Lever, the Meta spokeswoman, said the matter was pursued internally. Haidukevich and Sissons did not respond to requests for comment.

Choe says Facebook took no action on the accounts, which were still active on Facebook and Instagram on Tuesday afternoon. "It's a failure of due diligence on a massive scale, a systemic massive scale," he said.

Following months of what Choe described as inaction, he and Whistleblower Aid confidentially submitted complaints in December about the activity in Belarus to the Justice and Treasury departments. Months later, a day after Russian tanks rolled into Ukraine, Choe and his lawyers submitted the complaint focused on sanctions violations in Ukraine.

Facebook says it reviews its content with an eye to sanctions laws, and has on some occasions removed content, such as [posts from terrorist organizations](#), and closed accounts, citing sanctions. But the company's application of its policies has been uneven, say three people familiar with discussions between company and government officials.

In the absence of clarity from the government, companies are often forced to interpret sanctions enforcement on their own. Facebook's own secret list of "Dangerous Organizations and Individuals" that are not allowed on the platform, published last year [by the Intercept](#), contains many entities that have been placed under sanctions for terrorism in the United States.

Facebook weighs whether to censor individuals who are affiliated with a government if the result would be that that government might take legal action against the platform, said one of the people. In countries such as Russia, which has passed laws limiting U.S. tech giants' abilities to operate there, executives have discussed how enforcing content policies could result in the Kremlin curtailing the company's ability to operate and provide an important service to the public. Last week, Russian authorities blocked access to Facebook, curtailing citizens' access to news about the war.

If a sanctioned individual or entity used a social media account to raise money, it would almost certainly violate sanctions law, some experts say. Then the activity isn't merely the exercise of free speech; it's using a U.S.-based company's services to engage in business that might, in practice, evade other elements of the economic sanctions.

"There is a very clear line that gets drawn at fundraising," said Brian O'Toole, a former Treasury Department sanctions official who is now a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council think tank.

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HEADLINE	03/10 Internet watching oligarchs' yachts seized
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/10/russian-oligarch-yacht-tracking/
GIST	<p>There's just something satisfying about watching online as a billionaire's luxury yacht moves around the globe — and then gets snagged by law enforcement as part of sanctions designed to crack down on Russia.</p> <p>Alex Finley thinks of it as schadenfreude, or getting pleasure from another's troubles. Finley, an author and former C.I.A. officer, is online tweeting names, locations, ownership and the latest status of various yachts owned by Russian oligarchs.</p> <p>Seeing the yachts being seized feels like a "little bit of justice," Finley said.</p> <p>She's part of a growing group of online spectators watching and reporting as governments around the world seize Russian oligarchs' assets as part of sanctions for Russia's invasion of Ukraine. While money can often be hidden and moved between offshore bank accounts, it's trickier to conceal a 511-foot megayacht with an indoor pool, multiple helipads and a tracking system.</p> <p>Using automated Twitter accounts, online tracking sites and homemade bingo cards, casual fans of financial retribution are following the location of the oligarchs' ships and jets, often hoping to catch them on the run or docked in a country likely to seize them. Social media accounts have sprung up to follow the movements of these luxurious vehicles and keep track of which ones have been frozen or taken into possession by governments.</p> <p>They use sites like VesselFinder, MarineTraffic or SuperYachtFan where you can type in a ship's name or unique identifiers, known as an International Maritime Organization (IMO) number or Maritime Mobile</p>

Service Identity (MMSI). Thanks to similar satellite-based tracking technology, oligarchs' private jet locations can also be tracked online through sites like [Flightradar24.com](https://www.flightradar24.com). It's not just location information.

Some of the more expensive and well known yachts have their own Wikipedia pages and online followings, where details about their most over-the-top features are documented.

The Russian billionaires became the new object of fascination after the White House and European Union [moved to sanction](#) dozens of individual oligarchs and their associates as part of the larger Western crackdown on Russia following its invasion of Ukraine.

"The United States and governments all over the world will work to identify and freeze the assets Russian elites and their family members hold in our respective jurisdictions — their yachts, luxury apartments, money, and other ill-gotten gains," according to the White House [in a March 3 statement](#).

Yacht watchers have already witnessed a number of seizures. Italian financial police seized the superyacht Lena and another named Lady M, belonging respectively to Russian oligarchs Gennady Timchenko and Alexei Mordashov, [according to the Associated Press](#). VesselFinder showed both on its maps recently, docked in Italian ports.

Late last week, the French Finance Ministry [announced](#) on Twitter it had seized a [281-foot-long superyacht](#) worth \$120 million that belonged to Russian oligarch Igor Sechin, the CEO of oil giant Rosneft. Called the Amore Vero, that ship's recent locations were not as easy to find on tracking sites.

Yachts are often not required by law to share their location, but they do so for safety. However, they can turn off their automated tracking system if they want to sail under the radar.

The Russian-owned megayachts have become a clear object that people can focus their anger and attention on, yacht tracking fans say.

"There's a symbolic power that the yacht holds in the West's campaign to rein in the power of Vladimir Putin and his global kleptocracy," said Oliver Houston, a political campaigner and writer from London. Houston has been active on the #YachtWatch trend on Twitter.

If the rich owners are losing their prized possessions, they might be incentivized to put pressure on Putin to back out of Ukraine, Houston figures.

The practice of tracking billionaires' jets is hardly new — hobbyists, reporters and observers have long followed executives' and government leaders' movements by tracking their private planes. In 2017, a federal investigation probed then-Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin's trip on a political contributor's plane. ([It was found to be legal](#).) And while Amazon searched for a second headquarter city in 2018, [journalists tracked](#) where founder Jeff Bezos's jet traveled to try to find clues. (Bezos owns The Washington Post.)

Nineteen-year-old college student Jack Sweeney, who gained fame this year for demanding Elon Musk pay him \$50,000 to shut down an account that tracked the billionaire's private jet, has turned his attention and massive Twitter following to the oligarchs' property. ([Musk offered the University of Central Florida student \\$5,000, which Sweeney declined](#).)

He runs the [@RussiaYachts](#) Twitter account, which has shared some locations of the vessels, along with a list of several superyachts and their billionaire owners. Sweeney also created a Twitter account that [shares automated updates](#) of oligarchs' jets movements.

He started tracking the oligarchs' property after getting a flood of messages from people who knew about his flight-tracking prowess. It's a way to make the locations more transparent, even when their owners are trying to fly (or sail) under the radar.

“They think they’re hidden but they’re not, necessarily,” he said.

Private jets are less flashy than the megayachts, at least on the outside, but they’re still an object of fascination online.

“Some are very recognizable. Some have custom paint jobs,” said Jon Ostrower, editor in chief of [the Air Current](#), a news site reporting on the aerospace industry. “[Russian billionaire] Roman Abramovich has an aircraft that he’s always maintained called the Bandit, a 767 painted all white except for this black stripe over the cockpit windows. It was sharp.”

On Twitter, college student Sweeney uses data from [ADS-B Exchange](#), an open-source company that publishes a map of flight movements around the world. Founder Dan Streufert said pretty much any plane flying around the globe has a transponder that broadcasts the plane’s unique ID and its position, for safety reasons such as avoiding collisions. ADS-B Exchange relies on crowdsourced data — aviation and radio hobbyists have receivers that collect data from the flights’ transponders, which the company then plots onto a map.

The system isn’t without its gaps. Areas without participating receivers will show fewer flights, and military planes can turn off their transponders, making some areas — such as Crimea — appear as though they have empty skies.

Streufert said he understands people’s fascination with the massive jets. Not many people have their own private fleets, after all.

“It can help hold not only [the oligarchs] accountable, but also the countries they fly into, because some countries are saying they are going to seize assets,” he said.

Yachts can sometimes be more difficult to track, especially if they are not near a port. [MarineTraffic](#), a website that publishes data about ships’ whereabouts, uses a network of receivers on land as well as satellites to track the boats’ positions no matter where they are.

The company has about 6.5 million unique users each month, ranging from hobbyists to shipping and banking industry professionals who use the data to keep track of assets, said the company’s media and communications leader, Georgios Hatzimanolis.

Since the invasion in Ukraine began, MarineTraffic has seen a “huge spike” in interest, he said, a level not seen since a [massive ship got stuck](#) in the Suez Canal one year ago. The much-memed plight of the stuck containership Ever Given was monitored on marine tracking sites like MarineTraffic and VesselFinder, where it was often represented by a giant rectangle wedged diagonally in the Suez Canal.

People are also monitoring villas and other lavish properties that belong to Russia’s elite, looking up online listings and satellite images as well as searching public property records while waiting to see if they are seized by local governments.

Still, “the yacht is a particularly powerful symbol — not only of their power, but also of our power to be sure that we are hitting them where it hurts,” #YachtWatch user Houston said.

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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	03/10 Tribunal: 2 Hezbollah in killing Lebanon PM
SOURCE	https://www.courthousenews.com/in-reversal-tribunal-convicts-hezbollah-members-of-killing-lebanese-prime-minister/

GIST	<p>THE HAGUE, Netherlands (CN) — An appeals chamber in The Hague found two Hezbollah members guilty Thursday of the 2005 assassination that killed Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.</p> <p>The Special Tribunal for Lebanon, an ad-hoc tribunal created by the United Nations in 2009 to investigate the suicide bomb attack which killed Hariri and 22 others, overturned the 2020 acquittal of Hussein Hassan Oneissi and Hassan Habib Merhi, convicting them of committing a terrorist act and murder.</p> <p>"The appeals chamber has unanimously decided to reverse the acquittals," Presiding judge Ivana Hrdlickova said, reading the judgment out loud on behalf of the five-judge panel. The court was on the brink of shutting its doors after the initial verdict was reached in 2020, but donors stepped in to ensure the appeal could be seen through.</p> <p>Hariri, a Lebanese business tycoon, became the country's first prime minister following a 15-year civil war. His six-car convoy was traveling from a café en route to his home along a seaside road in Beirut on Valentine's Day 2005 when a Mitsubishi van packed with 4,000 pounds of TNT exploded nearby.</p> <p>Five men in total were charged, marking the first time the crime of terrorism has been prosecuted in an international tribunal. The U.N. court, based in the Netherlands due to security concerns in Lebanon, initially found no evidence for the involvement of the Syrian government or Hezbollah leadership in the 2005 attack, but did find sufficient evidence to convict Salim Ayyash of all five charges. The 2,600-page decision came two weeks after a massive explosion ripped through the country's capital, killing nearly 200 people and injuring thousands.</p> <p>The prosecution chose not to appeal the acquittal of Assad Hassan Sabra, who was seen as having the weakest connection to the attack. The charges against a fifth man, Mustafa Badreddine, were dropped after he was killed in Damascus in 2016.</p> <p>Nearly all of the evidence was circumstantial telecommunications data. The prosecution mapped out the movements of the five men using the location data of more than 50 phones.</p> <p>In reading the appellate ruling summary Thursday, Hrdlickova said there was a "sufficient connection" to overturn the acquittal of Oneissi and Merhi.</p> <p>All of the men were tried in absentia, a first for an international court since the post-World War II Nuremberg trials. The whereabouts of Ayyash, Oneissi and Merhi are unknown, though they are believed to be in Syria. Lawyers for Ayyash, who was given five concurrent life sentences, also wanted to appeal his conviction but were told there was no legal framework to allow an appeal to be brought for someone convicted in absentia.</p> <p>Should any of the men be captured or turn themselves in, they could all ask for a retrial, though it is unclear what court would hear such a proceeding.</p> <p>The tribunal, originally given a three-year mandate and predicted to cost \$120 million, has come under fire for both its expenses and slow pace. The investigation and trial have taken over 15 years and cost more than \$1 billion. Lebanon contributes 49% of the tribunal's budget with the remaining 51% coming from voluntary contributions from 28 countries.</p> <p>A hearing on sentencing for Merhi and Oneissi will be scheduled in the coming months.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Man gets 3yrs: conspiring, support to Hamas
SOURCE	https://www.kare11.com/article/news/local/george-floyd/man-sentenced-after-conspiring-to-provide-support-to-terrorist-organization/89-928aa1dd-4fb8-4a80-a629-4c49ad5241ce

GIST	<p>MINNEAPOLIS — A New Brighton man was sentenced to three years in prison for conspiring and attempting to provide material to support Hamas – a designated foreign terrorist organization during the unrest following George Floyd's murder.</p> <p>Michael Robert Solomon, 31, a self-described member of the "Boogaloo Bois," a group that is loosely connected to individuals who support anti-government sentiments, was sentenced to 36 months on Thursday after pleading guilty back on May 4, 2021.</p> <p>According to court documents, a witness said Solomon and another man, Benjamin Ryan Teeter, were openly carrying a firearm in a residential neighborhood in Minneapolis. Both Solomon and Teeter were in contact with the witness over the course of several days. The witness told FBI agents that Solomon and Teeter both possessed firearms and substantial quantities of ammunition, and had discussed with other member of the Boogaloo Bois and members of a sub-group called "Boojahideen" committing violent acts against police officers and other targets.</p> <p>The allegations in the criminal complaint and law enforcement affidavit say that in early June 2020, the FBI received information about Solomon, Teeter and other members of the Boogaloo Bois and the Boojahideen through a confidential source, whom the defendants believed to be a member of Hamas.</p> <p>In an audio-recorded conversation, Solomon and Teeter expressed that Hamas shares anti-U.S. government views that align with their own, and that they wanted to be "mercenaries" for Hamas as a way to make money for their movement.</p> <p>According to court documents, Solomon and Teeter shared with the confidential source and another individual, an undercover FBI employee who they believed to be a more senior member of Hamas, their ideas of destroying government monuments, raiding the headquarters of a white supremacist organization in North Carolina and targeting politicians and media members.</p> <p>Court documents also say Solomon and Teeter expressed their ability to manufacture unmarked parts for guns and unregistered and untraceable weapons, including suppressors.</p> <p>On July 30, Solomon and Teeter delivered five suppressors to the individual they believed to be a senior member of Hamas, according to the criminal complaint and law enforcement affidavit. Solomon and Teeter also expressed their desire to manufacture additional suppressors and fully automatic weapons for Hamas. The two negotiated a price of \$1,800 with the individual for five additional suppressors and also delivered a "drop in auto sear," which is a part intended to convert a weapon to shoot automatically.</p> <p>According to the allegations in the criminal complaint and law enforcement affidavit, Solomon and Teeter believed the suppressors and the drop in auto sear would be used by Hamas overseas to attack Israeli and U.S. soldiers.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Defense lawyer 9/11 suspect asks to resign
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/defense-lawyer-for-9-11-suspect-resigns-as-performance-and-conduct/ar-AAUUmis?li=BBnbcA1
GIST	<p>The defense lawyer for one of the Guantanamo Bay detainees awaiting trial for 9/11-related terror charges has asked to resign from the case, citing a military review of her 'performance and conduct.'</p> <p>Cheryl Bormann, a Chicago-based lawyer who specializes in death penalty cases, has since 2011 represented a Yemeni detainee, Walid bin Attash - accused of training the 9/11 hijackers.</p> <p>Bormann has now applied to leave the case, saying that a Military Commissions Defense Organization investigation into her work means it is impossible for her to continue to represent bin Attash.</p>

It was unclear what the issues were with her 'performance and conduct' and when the request was made, [The New York Times](#), which first reported the news, said the issues were 'recently.'

Bin Attash is one of five men due to go on trial for the attacks, in a long-anticipated case that still has no date to begin. He will be tried alongside Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the 58-year-old Pakistani militant described as the ringleader of the plot.

In August 2019, a trial date was set for January 2021, but that was soon abandoned.

On the 20th anniversary of the attacks, last year, some reports said the trial could begin in April.

Bormann's request potentially throws that date into jeopardy. The next hearing has been rescheduled for March 21.

Colonel Matthew McCall, who is presiding over the case, has given lawyers and prosecutors until next week to file pleadings on whether he should release Bormann from the case.

Bormann worked as part of the Cook County public defender's homicide task force until Governor Pat Quinn of Illinois abolished the death penalty in 2011.

She then joined the war court bar, and has not shied away from using blunt terms in the case.

She has referred to prosecutors as working for 'the government that wants to kill him.'

She also raised eyebrows by, in her first court appearance in Guantanamo in 2012, wearing a head scarf and a black abaya, a traditional robe worn by women in Saudi Arabia, where bin Attash grew up.

Victims' families complained that it was a sign of submission to the terrorists' ideology, but she said it was a sign of respect.

Bormann is not alone in representing bin Attash, but she is the only one on the team who counts as 'learned counsel,' meaning she has experience in death penalty trials.

The other lawyers on her team - three civilians and two members of the military - do not have her experience.

If Bormann does leave the case, it will likely cause significant delays because there are no back-up learned counsels waiting in the wings.

When the learned counsel for another defendant, Ramzi bin al-Shibh, left the case in 2020 due to a heart condition, it took several months to hire and obtain security clearance for his replacement.

The lawyer then requested 30 months to prepare.

His request was never acted on, because the court then closed due to the pandemic.

Since 2002, roughly 780 detainees have been held at the American military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Now, 38 remain.

Of the 38, 12 have been charged with war crimes in the military commissions system; 10 are awaiting trial and two have been convicted.

Seven detainees are held in indefinite law-of-war detention and are neither facing tribunal charges nor being recommended for release.

	<p>And 19 are held in law-of-war detention but have been recommended for transfer with security arrangements to another country.</p> <p>President Joe Biden has released two detainees so far - most recently on Monday, when Mohammad Ahmad al-Qahtani was flown back to Saudi Arabia.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Pentagon report: failings in Kenya attack
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/10/us/politics/shabab-manda-bay-kenya-attack.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — A series of security lapses and an “inadequate focus” on threats on the ground helped lead to a deadly assault on a sprawling military base in Kenya in 2020 that killed three Americans, a Pentagon investigation has concluded.</p> <p>The inquiry, led by the United States Africa Command, also found what the head of the command described as “shortcomings” in the sharing of intelligence and deficiencies in the preparation of security forces charged with guarding the base.</p> <p>“We were not as prepared at Manda Bay as we needed to be,” Gen. Stephen J. Townsend, the commander of Africa Command, said in a video presentation of the findings at the Pentagon on Thursday.</p> <p>The report found that “certain senior officers contributed to the inadequate force protection posture at Manda Bay, and allowed a climate of complacency and poor understanding of the threat.” Eight officers and enlisted personnel were disciplined for their actions or their failure to act, the Air Force said. But a spokeswoman for the service declined to describe the punishments or the fate of those personnel.</p> <p>The brazen assault by 30 to 40 Shabab fighters at Manda Bay, a sleepy seaside base near the Somali border, resulted in the largest number of U.S. military-related fatalities in Africa since October 2017, when four soldiers were killed in an ambush in Niger.</p> <p>The attack by the Shabab, Al Qaeda’s affiliate in East Africa, revealed several glaring security shortfalls, a New York Times investigation found soon after the assault. It also highlighted the U.S. military’s limits in Africa, where a lack of intelligence — along with Manda Bay’s reputation as a quiet and unchallenged tourist locale — allowed a lethal strike.</p> <p>The Times investigation found that American commandos took about an hour to respond. Many of the local Kenyan forces assigned to defend the base hid in the grass while U.S. troops and support staff members were corralled into tents with little protection to wait out the battle. Evacuating one of the wounded to a military hospital in Djibouti, about 1,000 miles north, took hours.</p> <p>Lt. Gen. Steven L. Basham, the Air Force’s deputy commander for Europe and Africa, told reporters on Thursday that in the early morning of Jan. 5, 2020, two U.S. service members driving a small truck along a runway on the base saw thermal images of what they initially thought were hyenas. They realized too late that the images were of Shabab fighters hiding in the vegetation.</p> <p>The fighters fired two rocket-propelled grenades at the truck. One exploded, killing Specialist Henry Mayfield Jr., 23, of the Army, the report found. The other service member in the truck was able to get out.</p> <p>The Shabab fighters then fired rockets at an airplane on the tarmac. It caught fire, killing the pilots, both of whom were American contractors, General Basham said. Dustin Harrison, 47, and Bruce Triplett, 64, were two experienced pilots with L3 Technologies, a Pentagon contractor that helped with surveillance and reconnaissance missions around the world.</p> <p>During the news briefing on the report, the Pentagon declined to go into detail about whether any of the senior officers involved had been fired.</p>

	<p>Africa Command conducted an initial investigation shortly after the attack, but the results were bottled up in the Pentagon in the final months of the Trump administration and were never approved or made public.</p> <p>When the Biden administration took office last January, Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III ordered a review of the Africa Command's inquiry, in part to avoid a repeat of the contentious Defense Department investigation into the 2017 Niger attack. That report found widespread problems across all levels of the military counterterrorism operation but focused in particular on the actions of junior officers leading up to the ambush — unfairly so, in the view of many family members, lawmakers and James N. Mattis, the defense secretary at the time.</p> <p>The review that Mr. Austin requested, conducted by Gen. Paul E. Funk II, the head of the Army's Training and Doctrine Command, validated the Africa Command's findings, officials said on Thursday.</p> <p>The Manda Bay deaths signified a grim expansion of the Shabab campaign against the United States, which was often confined to Somalia but in this case spilled over into Kenya despite an escalating American air campaign in the region at the time.</p> <p>During his final weeks in office, President Donald J. Trump ordered most of the 700 U.S. troops in Somalia to leave the country but not the region. Most of the forces transferred to Djibouti or Kenya, including Manda Bay, where security was improved, officials said. The Biden administration is conducting a review to determine whether to send any of those troops back to Somalia.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 ISIS names new leader; scant information
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/10/world/middleeast/isis-new-leader.html
GIST	<p>BEIRUT, Lebanon — The Islamic State on Thursday announced that it has a new leader, but provided little information on the true identity or background of the man who will now oversee the global terrorist organization.</p> <p>The new leader, Abu al-Hasan al-Hashimi al-Qurashi, was unveiled in an audio message released on Islamic State social media accounts that also confirmed the death of the group's previous leader, who American officials say blew himself up during a U.S. commando raid on his hide-out in northwestern Syria last month.</p> <p>Mr. al-Qurashi takes the reins of a terrorist group that is a shadow of its former self in terms of members and power, but still causes havoc in poorly governed areas in Syria, Iraq, parts of Africa and elsewhere.</p> <p>In January, Islamic State fighters carried out a daring attack on a prison run by a U.S.-backed Kurdish militia in northeastern Syria with the aim of liberating their detained comrades. Hundreds of attackers, prisoners and Kurdish militiamen were killed in more than a week of fighting before the prison was brought back under Kurdish control. It is still unclear how many prisoners managed to escape during the violence.</p> <p>A few days after the prison battle ended, American commandos carried out a raid on a farmhouse in northwestern Syria, far from the Islamic State's traditional redoubt, aimed at killing or capturing the man who then served as the group's leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi.</p> <p>Mr. al-Qurayshi detonated some explosives during the raid, U.S. officials said, killing himself and others in the house.</p> <p>The Islamic State did not immediately comment on the raid and only confirmed the death of the former leader in the audio message.</p> <p>The message said that he had designated his successor before he died, but otherwise offered scant information about the new leader, providing neither his real name nor an image of him, and making it hard to draw conclusions about his outlook or how he might lead the group.</p>

	<p>Withholding that information will most likely diminish the chances that the new leader can be hunted down and killed. Both of his predecessors were killed by U.S. commandos in northwestern Syria, where they had been trying to live off the grid and communicate with underlings only via trusted courier to avoid detection.</p> <p>In recent years, the Islamic State has gone from running a proto-state the size of Britain in Iraq and Syria, to operating as a diffuse organization that carries out mostly unsophisticated attacks in isolated parts of Iraq and Syria.</p> <p>Though the group appears to be at its lowest ebb in Iraq in years, terrorism experts caution that governments have written ISIS off before, only to see it come roaring back when conditions gave it an opening.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/11 The four deadliest terrorist groups 2021
SOURCE	https://www.visionofhumanity.org/the-four-deadliest-terrorist-groups-in-2021/
GIST	<p>The Taliban were overtaken by IS as the world's deadliest terrorist group in 2021, despite deaths attributed to the group and its affiliates slightly declining from 2,100 to 2,066 deaths.</p> <p>The past decade has seen the largest surge in terrorist activity in the past fifty years. The deadliest attack of 2021 occurred when an Islamic State (IS) suicide bomber detonated two suicide bombs at Afghanistan's Kabul International Airport, resulting in 170 deaths and over 200 injuries.</p> <p>The four deadliest terrorist group responsible for the most deaths in 2021 were Islamic State (IS), Al-Shabaab, the Taliban and Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM). These four groups were responsible for 3,364 deaths from terrorism, representing 47 percent of total deaths in 2021. Another 2,775 of terrorism deaths were not attributed to any organisation. Three of these four groups were also the deadliest groups last year, with JNIM replacing Boko Haram this year.</p> <p>In 2012, just prior to the large global increase in terrorist activity, these four groups were responsible for just under 16 percent of all deaths from terrorism.</p> <p>Islamic State (IS) alongside its affiliate groups, were the deadliest terrorist group of 2021.</p> <p>Islamic State (IS) and its affiliate groups Islamic State – Khorasan Province (ISK), Islamic State Sinai Province (IS-SP) and Islamic State West Africa (ISWA) recorded the most attacks and deaths of any terrorist group in 2021.</p> <p>IS deaths represented 29 percent of all deaths from terrorism globally in 2021. Despite this, IS attacks fell from 837 in 2020 to 794 in 2021, a decrease of five percent. Deaths as a result of IS attacks mirrored this trend, declining almost two percent between 2020 and 2021. IS recorded attacks in 21 countries in 2021 compared with 30 in 2020. In 2021, IS attacks occurred in every region in the world apart from North America and Russia and Eurasia. The deadliest attack of 2021 occurred when an Islamic State (IS) suicide bomber detonated two suicide bombs at Afghanistan's Kabul International Airport, resulting in 170 deaths and over 200 injuries.</p> <p>The Taliban</p> <p>The withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan as outlined in the 2020 peace agreement between the US and Afghanistan made for the ideal conditions for the Taliban to reassume control of the country after 20 years of US-backed coalition rule.</p> <p>The Taliban were responsible for 376 deaths in 2021, marking a 32 per cent decrease from 2020 and the lowest number of deaths since 2016. There was a minor decrease in the total number of terrorist attacks by the Taliban, decreasing from 242 in 2020 to 232 in 2021. Attacks became less deadly in 2021, with an average of 1.6 deaths per attack, compared to 2.4 in 2020. Of the 232 attacks attributed to the Taliban in 2021, 56 per cent did not result in any fatalities while only three attacks resulted in more than 10 deaths.</p> <p>Al Shabaab</p>

Al-Shabaab, a Salafist militant group active in East Africa, first emerged in a battle over Somalia's capital in the summer of 2006. As an Al Qaeda affiliate based in Somalia and Kenya, Al-Shabaab pursues Islamist statehood aspirations in Somalia.

In 2021, terrorism deaths attributed to Al-Shabaab continued to decline, falling 17 percent from the prior year. Of the 571 deaths attributed to Al-Shabaab in 2021, 93 percent occurred in Somalia, compared to six percent in Kenya. The total number of terror incidents fell by 56 attacks to 303 attacks from 2020 to 2021. Over 51 percent of the attacks in 2021 resulted in at least one fatality. This marks a significant decline from 2020, where 81 percent of attacks resulted in at least one death.

Al-Jamaat Nusrat

Since its emergence in 2017, JNIM has expanded across West Africa while committing acts of violence against civilians, local security forces and counter-terrorism operations comprising of international militaries and UN peacekeepers.

Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) is the fastest growing terrorist group and was responsible for 351 deaths in 2021, a 69 per cent increase. Of the four deadliest terrorist groups in 2021 only JNIM recorded an increase in the level of terrorism incidents over the prior year.

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	03/10 Russia forcing conscripts to fight
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/5dgqen/russia-conscripts-ukraine-invasion-volunteers
GIST	<p>Shortly after midnight on Feb. 25, less than 24 hours after Russia launched a full-scale invasion and sent missiles raining down over Ukraine, Mark Savchuk was already bound for the capital.</p> <p>“On my way to Kyiv... Can’t wait to join the local armed group,” he told VICE World News, messaging as he travelled from Lviv in western Ukraine. “Miss my city so much.”</p> <p>Before the war, 32-year-old Savchuk was a professional PR consultant. He enjoyed playing sports, travelling, and the occasional bit of live action role playing, or LARPing. On his Facebook page there are photos of him dressed in Ukrainian army fatigues, strutting around a makeshift military encampment and brandishing a revolver.</p> <p>But this is just cosplay. In truth, like thousands of other young Ukrainians wanting to become involved in their country’s resistance struggle, he has never experienced real combat.</p> <p>“Which is why they [the Ukrainian army and territorial defence] will probably tell me to f**k off,” he reasoned. “They don’t accept people with no military experience to local armed groups. They are ‘full’ already.”</p> <p>Less than two weeks since the Russian assault, tens of thousands of Ukrainians have flocked to defence centres around the nation to join the armed resistance, outstripping munitions to the point where many are now being turned away.</p> <p>Some people are even trying to bribe military officials in a desperate bid to be considered for duty, according to several would-be volunteers who spoke to VICE World News. It’s a stark contrast to the Russian side, where the country’s Ministry of Defence admitted Wednesday that conscripts had been illegally deployed to Ukraine, and reports are emerging of soldiers being extorted and coerced into waging a war many don’t believe in.</p> <p>“Basically,” Savchuk said in a message, “you need to give bribes IN ORDER to join the army [in Ukraine].”</p>

VICE World News could not confirm whether any would-be soldiers successfully bought their way into the territorial defence. Yevhen Berdnikov, a 32-year-old freelance designer who's become an informal coordinator at a defence centre in Kyiv, said he personally heard of two people's attempted bribes getting declined. But that doesn't deter people from doing their part in resisting Russian aggression.

"Those who can't join the [territorial resistance] make masking nets at home or molotovs," Berdnikov told VICE World News. "Homeless people started collecting bottles and bringing them for molotovs. Basically everyone is either in the shelter or is preparing to fight."

Within the first 48 hours of the war, [18,000 assault rifles](#) were handed out to reservists in Kyiv, as a grassroots militia patrolled the streets, setting up makeshift military checkpoints and monitoring for Russian spies and saboteurs.

Shortly thereafter, according to Berdnikov, stores around the city started selling out of hunting rifles.

While in the immediate aftermath of the invasion Ukraine [banned men aged 18-60](#) from leaving the country, Berdnikov asserts that the majority of those who have remained in Kyiv have done so because of a desire to support the resistance.

"This is not some bravada," he said. "The city is open to leave by car or train, and whoever wanted to [has] left already. So we are fighting till the end and we're going to win this. Volunteers without guns will have pitchforks, kitchen knives and molotovs."

On the other side of the conflict, a very different picture is emerging showing a disjointed Russian invasion force featuring reluctant, and illegally deployed, young conscripts.

According to a Russian presidential decree, only professional soldiers, as opposed to conscripts completing their mandatory military service, can legally be dispatched abroad. President Vladimir Putin [insisted last week that](#) "conscript soldiers are not participating in hostilities and will not participate in them."

On March 9, however, the Ministry of Defence conceded that young men completing their military service had been pushed to the front line.

"Unfortunately, we have discovered several facts of the presence of conscripts in units taking part in the special military operation in Ukraine. Practically all such soldiers have been pulled out to Russia," the ministry said in a statement.

This admission merely confirmed what rights groups already knew. The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia (CSMR), an influential non-governmental organisation that aims to expose human rights violations within the Russian military, has been publicising reports of foul play from conscripts' family members since the invasion began. Families allege abuse by authorities, claiming their relatives have been deployed to border territories where Putin is mounting his onslaught or forced to sign professional contracts.

"Putin ruled out the participation of conscripts in a special operation in Ukraine. However, there are also commanders who fraudulently try to send conscripts to the place of conducting a special military operation," CSMR states on its [website](#). "Every day, relatives of such servicemen turn to us."

In the past two weeks, Russian independent outlet *Meduza* has also published [reports](#) of young Russian army conscripts being forcibly transferred to contract service and sent to the front lines of the conflict in Ukraine.

Andrey Kurochkin, deputy chairman of the CSMR, similarly told Russian news outlet *Takie Dela*: "There are facts of the use of physical violence, [and] beatings of those who refuse to become contract soldiers. Further, complete uncertainty, as their phones are taken away."

“We’ve had a flurry of calls from scared mothers all over Russia. They cry, they don’t know if their children are alive or healthy.”

As the conflict drags on and Ukraine mounts a stiffer-than-expected resistance, local authorities, news outlets and social media users have given other insights into the state of morale among Russian fighters. This has taken the form of a crowdsourced mosaic of images and soundbites that, while best consumed with a grain of salt in the context of an ongoing information war between the opposing sides, tells a plausible story about the realities on the ground.

Surfacing in recent weeks have been recordings of Russian troops [crying on the front lines](#) and [heartbroken text messages](#) to mothers back home, as well as videos of visibly dejected captured soldiers [claiming they were lied to](#) by their superiors.

“A lot of soldiers surrender. Most of them are fucking kids; 20 to 22 year olds,” Berdnikov writes in a virtual diary that he posted to Reddit. “Every one of them says the same thing—we didn’t know we’re going to war, they said it was military exercise, just go and you’ll get more orders in three days.”

Military service is mandatory in Russia for all men aged 18 to 27: 12 months of duty after just four months of basic training. Yet while avoiding the draft is a felony that carries a prison sentence of up to two years, many Russians opt out of the obligation through medical or educational exemptions. Some, in contrast to the recent actions of Ukrainian volunteers, [pay bribes](#) to members of draft boards, doctors, or other officials to avoid enlistment.

VICE World News spoke to one former conscript who served between 2019 and 2020. Sasha, who VICE World News is not naming [due to a crackdown on critics in Russia](#), claimed that not knowing where one is going or what one is doing was a core part of the conscript experience. And he did not have glowing things to say about the morale or mettle of those involved in Russia’s current invasion.

“Morale was never high among Russian conscripts to begin with, and the prospect of being sent to a war zone would certainly not improve it,” he said. “No untrained conscript ever wants to fight; no matter how dumb and/or high on propaganda he is, he has some basic sense of self-preservation.”

In contrast to the situation on the Ukrainian side of the border, Sasha claimed military volunteers among the Russian civilian population are almost non-existent—apart from “some crazies” who are at best outliers. He also gave credence to the reports of unwilling conscripts being strong-armed into front-line military service.

“It is actually a well-known practice,” he told VICE World News. “Some ten or 20 years ago it was entirely normal for a base commander to have a quota on new contract soldiers, and so conscripts would be forced to sign contracts with physical violence to meet that quota.

“A return of this practice on the eve of an offensive war sounds very plausible to me.”

“On the Russian side, I do think low morale has created enormous problems for the military. It’s led to the unusually high abandonment and capture of armoured vehicles, fouled logistics lines, and forced the Russian Army to rely on indirect fire like artillery to bombard cities to regain momentum.”

Indeed, last time Russia was on the eve of an offensive in Ukraine, during the 2014-2015 war in Donbas, two pro-Russian separatist regions in east Ukraine, human rights groups were [inundated with complaints from Russian conscripts](#) claiming they’d been tricked into signing contracts to become professional soldiers and were afraid they were going to be sent across the border to fight.

A similar reluctance, ignorance and unwillingness among the Russian forces sent into Ukraine last month appears to be manifesting in fairly predictable ways: a fractured offensive, a disunited front and an army of begrudging insurgents whose morale is through the floor. Reports of troops abandoning, and in some cases

sabotaging, vehicles and military hardware, as well as laying down their arms without a fight, have spread over the past week, most notably coming from Western [military](#) and [Pentagon officials](#).

While it's difficult to verify exactly how many Russian soldiers have been killed in Ukraine since the invasion began two weeks ago, if Pentagon estimates of [2,000 to 4,000](#) are to be believed, that would represent, proportionately speaking, a significantly higher loss of life than the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s. In that conflict, a total of 15,000 Soviet troops were killed over the course of a decade.

Against this backdrop of plummeting morale, Ukrainian government officials have come to the table to offer up their own cash incentives. Last week, the country's defence minister Oleksiy Reznikov announced on [social media](#) that any Russian soldiers who surrendered to Ukraine would be rewarded not only with amnesty and magnanimity, but also a handsome payout.

"Russian soldier! You were brought to our land to kill and die," said Reznikov. "Do not follow criminal orders. We guarantee you a full amnesty and 5 million rubles [about \$39,000] if you lay down your arms."

TV presenter Maria Yefrosinina, an ambassador of the United Nations Population Fund in Ukraine, put forward a similar offer days earlier, pledging 5 million rubles in cryptocurrency, cash or electronic funds to any Russian troops who turned themselves over.

"As soon as soldiers with military equipment surrender, they receive money," she said on [Instagram](#). "They can give up right now and get money right now."

Many analysts [expected Ukraine to fall within days](#). But now, with the war entering its third week, Ukrainian forces are digging in and proving themselves as a force to be reckoned with, repelling a Russian offensive that is appearing increasingly tired, incohesive and disillusioned.

"The relative morale of the two sides is playing a key role in shaping how the war is being fought," said Jason Lyall, an associate professor in transnational studies at Dartmouth College.

He told VICE World News that on the Ukrainian side, Zelenskyy's decision to remain in Kyiv and his skilled media presence has boosted morale, increased the number of volunteers joining the resistance, and inspired confidence among international backers like NATO.

"On the Russian side, I do think low morale has created enormous problems for the military. It's led to the unusually high abandonment and capture of armoured vehicles, fouled logistics lines, and forced the Russian Army to rely on indirect fire like artillery to bombard cities to regain momentum."

While patriotism, defiance and esprit de corps seem to be fuelling the Ukrainian resistance for now, it's unclear how long this will last. Russia appears to have momentarily wound back its ground offensive and resorted to [broadstroke, indiscriminate bombing strikes](#) on Ukrainian settlements in an attempt to turn the tide. As civilians become trapped in shelled cities and villages—cut off from medicine, heat and functioning water systems—the resolve of the defence forces may wane.

As Lyall pointed out: "Morale in wartime can be fluid... and so it still remains unclear what will happen once Russia encircles the main cities, cutting food supplies and electricity."

In any case, he adds, it's important not to overstate the power of morale in winning the war. Russia—which has considerably higher troop numbers, as well as more advanced weapons and air superiority—could still win the conflict by sheer magnitude alone.

At the same time though, Lyall suggests that if the rot of discontent runs deep enough in the Russian ranks then it may well be enough to erode the foundations of Putin's war machine, and ultimately prevent it from gaining any more traction in Ukraine.

“The key unknown factor right now? What the average Russian soldier thinks about the war,” he said. “If they’re indifferent, a sudden Russian victory, especially on the Donbass, might boost morale across the army. If they actively hate the war, however, then the Russian Army is unlikely to improve much, and will likely become increasingly brutal toward civilians and its own soldiers as the war drags on.”

Outside the mosaic of videos, images, text conversations and soundbites showing depleted Russian morale, it’s almost impossible to know what the average soldier is feeling about the current state of things—especially as Putin leads a fierce crackdown on dissent within his own borders.

For former Russian conscript Sasha, though, his country’s forces as a whole don’t have enough gas in the tank to compete with the dauntless Ukrainian masses.

“There are very few, if any, soldiers in Russia who could match their morale and cohesion, and Russian technological and numerical advantages are much less important if their troops don’t want to fight,” he said. “I’m entirely sure Ukrainians will ultimately defeat this evil.”

From the Ukrainian side of things, Berdnikov expressed a similar faith in his people’s ability to defend their homeland—come what may in the next few weeks, months and years.

“Every f*****g thing I’ve seen today showed me how UNITED we are. Every person is a friend and a brother... I’ve never felt so good about being a Ukrainian and living here,” he said in another diary entry. “When you see it, you realise that no army will conquer us. Three million people in Kyiv and each one of them will fight however they can.

“You come with a sword, you die from a sword.”

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HEADLINE	03/10 Collapse of Putin disinformation machinery
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/putin-collapse-disinformation-machinery-ukraine/
GIST	<p>FOR DECADES NOW, Vladimir Putin has slowly, carefully, and stealthily curated online and offline networks of influence. These efforts have borne lucrative fruit, helping Russia become far more influential than a country so corrupt and institutionally fragile had any right to be. The Kremlin and its proxies had economic holdings across Europe and Africa that would shame some of the smaller 18th-century empires. It had a vast network of useful idiots that it helped get elected and could count on for support, and it controlled much of the day-to-day narrative in multiple countries through online disinformation. And many people had no idea.</p> <p>While a few big events like the US’ 2016 election and the UK’s Brexit helped bring this meddling to light, many remained unaware or unwilling to accept that Putin’s disinformation machine was influencing them on a wide range of issues. Small groups of determined activists tried to convince the world that the Kremlin had infiltrated and manipulated the economies, politics, and psychology of much of the globe; these warnings were mostly met with silence or even ridicule.</p> <p>All that changed the moment Russian boots touched Ukrainian soil. Almost overnight, the Western world became overwhelmingly aware of the Kremlin’s activities in these fields, shattering the illusions that allowed Putin’s alternative, Kremlin-controlled information ecosystem to exist outside its borders. As a result, the sophisticated disinformation machinery Putin spent decades cultivating collapsed within days.</p> <p>RUSSIA’S NETWORK OF influence was as complex as it was sprawling. The Kremlin has spent millions in terms of dollars and hours in Europe alone, nurturing and fostering the populist right (Italy, Hungary, Slovenia), the far right (Austria, France, Slovakia), and even the far left (Cyprus, Greece, Germany). For years, elected politicians in these and other countries have been standing up for Russia’s interests and defending Russia’s transgressions, often peddling Putin’s narratives in the process. Meanwhile, on televisions, computers, and mobile screens across the globe, Kremlin-run media such as RT, Sputnik, and a host of aligned blogs and “news” websites helped spread an <i>alternative</i> view of the real</p>

world. Though often marginal in terms of reach in and of themselves (with some notable exceptions, such as Sputnik Mundo), they performed a key role in spreading disinformation to audiences in and outside of Russia.

But the digital realm is where Russia found most success in opening new fronts in its disinformation war. Social media, quasi-legitimate blogs, and bots reached ordinary people en masse all the time. With skill and care, Russian operatives tested and retested how best to polarize audiences. Using different platforms, content, and messaging, they built up a profile of users for their targeting purposes and then reflected back to them a picture of the world that would make them angry, frightened, and despairing—a picture that only exists online. For evidence of this, look no further than recent discourse in the West, where the Kremlin has been amplifying everything from climate denialism to the anti-vaxx movement to Qanon. All these things already existed but were the preserve of conspiracy theorists, quacks, and pranksters—now millions believe, in the face reality, that climate change was made up by Green extremists, that “they” (whether it be Bill Gates, George Soros, or the World Economic Forum) are using vaccines to microchip people, that there’s a satanic cabal of baby-eaters in Washington, or all of the above.

Critically, the Kremlin seemed to understand that while our online worlds are a key part of us, we behave differently there because it taps into our magical thinking. It is real and unreal at the same time. We troll each other, scream at each other, and produce millions of hours of ever-weirder porn, all because that world is slightly unreal. Few of us would do any of those things IRL. Yet, it is our real life, and the things we do online all have impacts, both positive and negative, on our psyche. The same holds true for disinformation. Our screens open up something akin to our spirituality, and from there we can make wild leaps of faith as to what is and isn’t real that translate from online to our offline thinking.

What the Kremlin failed to anticipate, however, is that the invasion of Ukraine would be the equivalent of Putin screaming at our face in the street—a brief but violent jolt in our collective online consciousness. It’s not just that what he claims about Ukraine is outlandish—after all, the Kremlin has been pushing many of these narratives for a long time and many in the West believed them until now—but that the reality of Putin’s actions have broken through the unreality of online life.

OF COURSE, THIS is not the first time Putin has invaded a neighboring country or territory and simultaneously launched an information war. But Ukraine has elicited an international response unlike anything we saw with Georgia in 2008 or Crimea in 2014. It may be because we have better internet usage and available open source data compared to 2008 (for example, the [Ukraine Witness map](#) built by the Centre for Information Resilience, where I serve as director for special projects, Bellingcat and other partners provide easily verifiable data that refute Putin’s claims), and in 2014 no one was willing to kick up a significant fuss over Russia taking over a largely Russian-speaking area. But this spectacular collapse of the Kremlin’s machinery is also because Putin violated two key rules of disinformation this time around.

The first is that arrogance is the death of a disinformation campaign. In the past, the Kremlin has spent months or even years testing messaging to make sure it would land with its various audiences, whereas this time they seem to have assumed success based on previous claims about Ukraine; but those earlier campaigns were not launched during a full invasion of the country. Whatever dissenting voices exist in Moscow—and there must have been some that knew disinformation would have its limits in a time like this—were drowned out by the ever expanding ego of an autocrat buoyed by no one reacting to his crimes for 20 years.

Putin also seems to have severely underestimated the extent to which the West had grown wiser to its manipulation in recent years, and developed new capabilities to combat it. It similarly failed to anticipate the social media savvy of Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky. While Zelensky engages on a human level through his accounts, Putin, Lavrov, and the other graying men sit at comically oversized tables in Moscow. Russia, as a leader in the field, should know that the very best manipulation is led by apparently humble—though morally bankrupt—and ideally anonymous groups of people who don’t take credit even when they are successful, don’t go for overkill even when they think it might work, and definitely don’t make themselves part of the story by looking as ridiculous as Putin has.

Russia has also broken another disinformation rule in Ukraine: Lie to others, but not to yourselves. Stories [from the frontlines](#) say it all. Russian soldiers were told they were going into Ukraine on training exercises and did not expect actual resistance. Others were told that they were going to be saving Ukraine from Nazis and would be welcomed with open arms, not Molotov cocktails. Still others were told to be on the lookout for followers of Ukrainian nationalist Stepan Bandera, who died 63 years ago.

These missteps have taken the rest of Putin's disinformation apparatus down with it: His usual apologists abroad have either fallen deathly silent or, even more damning, have openly recanted their former support. And the removal of RT and Sputnik from TV networks, social media, and search engines is, in no uncertain terms, devastating for Russia's capacity to peddle influence.

To be sure, the Kremlin is still trying to use the same models further afield, and while at this point they seem unlikely to succeed at the same scale as they have in the past, we shouldn't dismiss them entirely. From Uganda to India, Kremlin-aligned outlets and influencers have been trying to push the notion that Ukraine is racist whilst—implausibly—Russia is not. It is unclear if Putin's enablers are doing this simply to shore up access to their assets abroad. But if it's an attempt to sway political opinion toward Russia, then it has failed so far; in the UN vote condemning Putin's invasion, only Belarus, Eritrea, North Korea, and Syria voted with Russia.

ALREADY, THE KREMLIN'S slipping grip on the flows of information internationally has been devastating for Russia and its war machine. In Ukraine, Zelensky's approval ratings are at 92 percent, and 86 percent of Ukrainians now want to join NATO—up more than 20 points from January. The West, in the form of NATO and the EU, has never been more unified, coming together over sanctions and actions that they would never have agreed to in the past. The war is even breaking down some of the divides that the Kremlin itself helped engineer: In the UK, Brexiteers and Remainers are coming together over Ukraine, some talking to the other side without using expletives for the first time since 2016. In the US, Democratic senator Rob Wyden and Republican senator Mike Crapo couldn't be further apart on issues ranging from abortion to gun control to Trump, but they recently led their parties' joint efforts to ban Russian oil imports.

The golden era for Putin's disinformation programs is over. Most people in Western countries are suddenly much more suspicious of seemingly fake content, much more interested in investigating economic and political influence from Moscow, and much less willing to defend Russia's actions in the world's parliaments, in the media, or online. Rebuilding the Kremlin's machinery will require time and resources (both financial and personnel) that the regime currently does not have. Forget the fact that they've been called out on it, just paying the trolls would cost more now that the ruble is in the toilet; they need that money to buy replacement tanks, or widows' pensions for the soldiers they've sent to die.

They will try though. It's possible that they'll decide that their era of influence in Europe and the US is over for a time and divert their resources to using disinformation to protect their economic holdings in Africa and Asia, exploiting what they believe to be weaker infrastructures and resource bases to develop their political and economic influence in those regions. Just as the world has stood almost united with Ukraine, it will have to unite again if it wants these areas to learn from the mistakes of the West and build real resilience to the Kremlin's campaigns.

Nothing can make up for the senseless loss of life and homes, but if there is anything to celebrate alongside the dogged determination of the Ukrainians in holding the Russian army back, it is this; Putin has himself put to rest the idea that he is some kind of infallible genius. After many decades spent building up his influence, he has entirely destroyed his credibility with politicians, business, and the broader public. In the end, Putin has achieved what no one thought possible: a Ukraine defiant, a West united, and a Russia humbled.

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SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/mar/10/climate-change-fundamentally-affecting-european-birds-study-shows
GIST	<p>Global warming is changing European birds as we know them, a study has found, but it's not just the increase in temperature that's to blame.</p> <p>Researchers have found that garden warblers, for example, are having a quarter fewer chicks, which has huge implications for the species. Chiffchaffs are laying their eggs 12 days earlier. Some birds are decreasing in size, while others, such as redstarts, are getting larger.</p> <p>Researchers pored over data collected since the mid-60s in Britain and the Netherlands on 60 different species, including the house sparrow, the crested tit, the reed bunting, the bullfinch and the willow warbler. They zero in on how these birds have changed over time with regard to their egg-laying schedules, number of offspring and morphology.</p> <p>Although research has already linked the way passerines are getting smaller over time to hotter temperatures, scientists weren't sure whether this was due to heat stress directly or because rising temperatures make it harder to forage.</p> <p>The scientists investigated what proportion of changes over time were linked to warming, and whether warming affected some species or traits more than others, as well as whether other factors unrelated to temperature reinforced these effects.</p> <p>The study, which was published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences journal last week, found that although more than half of trait changes are linked with rising temperatures – and warming is likely the largest factor driving change over the years – other factors such as urbanisation, pollution, habitat loss and more could also affect shifts in characteristics.</p> <p>“For example, climate change caused chiffchaffs to lay their eggs six days earlier over the last 50 years, but other unknown environmental factors led to an additional six days, meaning in total they now lay their eggs 12 days earlier than they did half a century ago”, said Martijn van de Pol, lead author of the paper from James Cook University in Australia.</p> <p>A change in schedule this big can cause a mismatch between when chicks are born and when food is available for them, breaking the ecosystem balance.</p> <p>On average, up to 57% of overall change over the past decades can be linked to temperature warming, according to the study. Approximately 32% of 60 bird species had changes in body conditions due to temperatures, with an average decrease in size of 0.45% for every celsius increase in heat. About 86% had changes in egg-laying times, and 31% had changes in their number of offspring.</p> <p>“Garden warblers in the UK have experienced a 26% decrease in their average number of offspring over the past half century, which is really concerning for the long-term fate of this species,” said Nina McLean, the lead researcher on the study, from the ANU Research School of Biology. “But only half of this reduction, 13%, can be attributed to climate change.”</p> <p>Not all species are being affected the same way. Some, like the redstart, are clearly increasing their body condition and offspring number. The researchers speculate the variation of how much different species' traits are changing is most probably up to non-temperature factors.</p> <p>“The study gives a well-grounded explanation for why different species change at such different rates. And it is not to do with temperature sensitivity, but with those other, non-temperature factors,” said Shahar Dubiner, an ecologist at Tel Aviv University, who was not involved in the study. Dubiner's research has, similarly, found dramatic changes in shape and body condition for over half of Israeli bird species – including many who migrate from Europe, such as storks.</p>

	Overall, this means warming is likely the largest factor driving trait change, but it's not the only element at play. Other adjacent factors may play a more prominent role than previously thought – the question is what these other non-temperature factors are, and how they are linked to temperature increase.
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HEADLINE	03/10 CDC: flu vaccine not effective this season
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/10/health/flu-vaccine-effectiveness.html
GIST	<p>This season's flu vaccine has offered little to no protection against getting a mild or moderate case of influenza, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said this week.</p> <p>In a study of more than 3,600 Americans in seven states, the C.D.C. said in a report that the vaccine was only around 16 percent effective, a rate that it said was “not statistically significant.”</p> <p>“It's not ineffective, but it's clearly suboptimal in its efficacy,” Dr. Jesse L. Goodman, a former chief scientist at the Food and Drug Administration, said on Thursday. He reviewed the report but was not associated with it.</p> <p>Still, despite the vaccine's lackluster performance this season, which started in October and lasts through May, the C.D.C. suggested that people get inoculated, saying that it could “prevent serious outcomes.”</p> <p>Scientists had warned in 2020 that the flu season, if it was severe, could possibly converge with Covid to create a dreaded “twindemic.” But coronavirus restrictions — including working from home and the use of masks — along with a high flu vaccine rate may have helped reduce caseloads the last few seasons, during which, the C.D.C. said, cases have been at a record low.</p> <p>Still, even a mild flu season can be devastating. The C.D.C. estimated that during the 2019-20 flu season, around 22,000 people in the country had died and 400,000 had been hospitalized.</p> <p>This season, the agency said, “influenza activity” declined in December and January, during the worst of the Omicron surge, but increased in early February.</p> <p>In October and November of 2021, the agency investigated a flu outbreak at the University of Michigan, where there were 745 cases, mostly involving students who had not been vaccinated against the flu. Investigators there also found that the vaccine did not offer much protection.</p> <p>Dr. Goodman said that this season's results showed how much flu vaccines could be improved.</p> <p>“The next pandemic could be an influenza pandemic,” Dr. Goodman said, “so we need better vaccines.”</p> <p>Every year, scientists decide whether they need to update the flu vaccine to protect against the strains that they predict will dominate the upcoming season.</p> <p>The low efficacy rate this season, Dr. Goodman said, “suggests that there was a mismatch between the strains of virus in the vaccine and what's circulating.”</p> <p>Scientists updated this season's vaccines to offer protection against four flu viruses, including H3N2, which ended up being this season's dominant strain, the report said. H3N2 was also dominant during the 2017-18 flu season, which experts had said was “moderately severe.”</p> <p>Since the agency began calculating the vaccine's effectiveness in 2004, the efficacy rate has been as high as 60 percent — for the 2010-11 season — and as low as 10 percent, during the first season the C.D.C. tracked it. Dr. Goodman said he would consider a rate between 50 and 80 percent to be good.</p>

	The flu is a life-threatening respiratory illness that can fill up hospital beds. It shares symptoms with Covid, including fever, coughing, a sore throat and fatigue. Adults 65 and older, pregnant people, immunocompromised people and children under 5 are most at risk of the flu.
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HEADLINE	03/10 Canned pet food shortage continues
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/canned-pet-food-shortage-continues-amid-supply-chain-woes
GIST	<p>Pet owners may have a harder time than usual searching for their dog or cat's favorite canned food and — you guessed it — the supply chain backlogs are still to blame.</p> <p>In June 2021, the Pet Food Institute (PFI), which represents America's dog and cat food and treat makers, sent public comments to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) which outlined supply chain and manufacturing woes impacting the industry. And these same issues continue to plague manufacturers and consumers even now in 2022, according to PFI.</p> <p>"As the entire food system faced incredible disruption during the COVID-19 pandemic, U.S. pet food makers were also forced to address new ingredient sourcing and transportation challenges," said Dana Brooks, president and CEO of PFI. "America's dog and cat food makers responded with resiliency and are hard at work making nutritionally balanced food for our pets, but PFI is asking the Biden administration to identify policy solutions that will help further strengthen all of American food and agriculture for the future."</p> <p>Even after COVID-19 cases started to decrease and businesses resumed operations as normal, ingredients such as chicken by-products and vegetable oils, which are used in many canned food items for pets, were hard to come by, according to PFI.</p> <p>"These ingredient shortages have not abated as the pandemic began receding. PFI members report all ingredient costs have risen 8-20%, with dramatic price increases for corn and soybean derivatives, which are key ingredients in many dog and cat food formulations," PFI said.</p> <p>In California, franchises such as PetSmart are out of canned food in several locations, FOX 11 reported.</p> <p>The manager of Centinela Feed & Pet Supplies in Torrance, California, Jen Muise, said a shortage of workers at canning facilities has been a problem for pet stores since late last year.</p> <p>"A lot of times it's a good idea to work with groups that have their own physical canneries, brands like Lotus and Fromm who actually have not just U.S. based canneries but they own their own canneries so that way they control the supply, they control the functioning, you don't run into as many issues with that," Muise told FOX 11.</p> <p>"Brands like Stella and Chewy are converting into pouches of food as well as packs so they don't have to be dependent on the cannery or aluminum situation that we have," said Dan Ryu, COO of Centinela Feed & Pet Supplies.</p> <p>In January, the Tampa Bay Humane Society (TBHS) in Florida saw a shortage of some canned cat foods, specifically the wet, pate kinds, according to FOX 13 Tampa.</p> <p>"Fortunately, in our building, we've stocked up for the next few months," said Lon Savini, facilities director at TBHS. "But all that's really out there right now is shreds and bits."</p> <p>In America, some of the most popular canned pet foods are imported from overseas, and with transportation and fuel costs increasing amid inflation, the supply continues to dwindle.</p> <p>In 2021, global exports for pet food ingredients exceeded \$1.7 billion, PFI said.</p>

	<p>"American pet food has both a global presence and some pet food makers rely on key foreign inputs," PFI said. "Some ingredients must be sourced from abroad, owing to third country import requirements or the simple fact that some ingredients, notably minerals and 5 vitamins, are more abundant in some countries than in others. The success of U.S. pet food makers relies on reliable international export and import channels."</p> <p>Some pet food brands have also tripled in price in the past few months and protein costs are going up in addition to everything else.</p> <p>"My roommate gets Costco brand so I've been feeding him that and he seems to like that more honestly so I haven't really been buying the expensive stuff anymore," dog owner Matthew Adams told FOX 11.</p> <p>While the canned pet food industry continues to work to get whatever products they can out to consumers, they ask the public to buy only what is needed.</p> <p>"We encourage shoppers to only purchase the amount of food they would regularly need and recommend contacting the individual company for assistance regarding a specific pet food product," PFI said.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Gray whales arriving earlier than normal
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/unprecedented-gray-whales-arriving-in-washington-waters-earlier-than-normal
GIST	<p>WHIDBEY ISLAND, Wash. - Experts say the small population of gray whales are returning to Pacific waters earlier than usual.</p> <p>Each year, typically beginning mid-February to early March, the gray whales stop off Washington's coast and island areas as they head north in search of food.</p> <p>One of the whales, CRC53 (or "Little Patch"), was first spotted on Dec. 7, 2021-- months ahead of the expected date.</p> <p>"'Little Patch' has often been one of the earliest or first arrivals, and this year was no exception. His official arrival date of December 7, 2021 means he chose to skip the remainder of the southbound migration to the mating and birthing lagoons of Baja, Mexico to feed in these inland waters," according to the Orca Network.</p> <p>Another whale, CRC22 or "Earhart," also arrived early-- two months early, which meant she chose to skip the remainder of the southbound migration to feed inland.</p> <p>As of March 9, another nine gray whales returned and two "new" whales have also made their way into Washington waters.</p> <p>In 2019, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) designated a gray whale "Unusual Mortality Event," or UME, defined as "a stranding that is unexpected (and) involves a significant die-off of any marine mammal population."</p> <p>"During the UME years, several of the gray whales have been arriving earlier and staying longer. Also, during the UME years, there has been an increase in the number of additional grays who have discovered these feeding areas-- approximately 25 individuals since 2018," the Orca Network said.</p> <p>Many of the new whales have returned one or more years, taking advantage of the ghost shrimp found along some north Puget Sound shorelines.</p>
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	03/10 Seattle fentanyl distribution crackdown
SOURCE	https://seattlemedium.com/seattle-fentanyl-distribution-crackdown/
GIST	<p>Seattle leaders have targeted opioid as a major problem among its citizens. Law enforcement are targeting users and sellers of the drug. A recent arrest was near International District. It's part of an undercover operation to combat open air drug markets in the city.</p> <p>Seattle's International District was the area where a 21-year-old Kent man was caught selling the drug. He is facing charges of distribution and possession of fentanyl. Mar'jon Guyton, is charged with two counts of distribution of fentanyl, one count of possession of fentanyl with intent to distribute and one count of unlawful possession of a firearm, according to a March 4 U.S. Department of Justice news release.</p> <p>Fentanyl is formally used to treat severe cancer pain. The common brands are: Duragesic, Abstral and Subsys. It's a controlled substance with a high risk for addiction and dependence. It can cause respiratory distress and death when taken in high doses or when combined with other substances, especially alcohol or other illicit drugs such as heroin or cocaine.</p> <p>Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is 80-100 times stronger than morphine. A combination of the Seattle Police Department, King County Sheriff's Office and the federal Drug Enforcement Administration have been using targeted undercover operations to combat open air drug markets in Seattle.</p> <p>U.S. Attorney Nick Brown joined Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell and law enforcement leaders on March 4 to highlight a series of arrests aimed at removing persistent fentanyl dealers—some of whom are illegally armed with firearms—from the 12th Avenue South and South Jackson Street area in Seattle's International District.</p> <p>Sixteen people have been arrested for felonies in the undercover operation. These types of cases are often referred to the U.S. Attorney's Office where the defendant is then charged federally, arrested and held at the Federal Detention Center in SeaTac. There they await further hearings and release date.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Mexico, US takedown human smugglers
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/border-security/law-enforcement-cooperation-between-united-states-and-mexico-leads-to-mexican-takedown-of-significant-human-smugglers/
GIST	<p>Extensive bilateral cooperation between the United States and Mexico resulted in the Mexico Attorney General's Office's "Fiscalía General de la República" (FGR) conducting a significant enforcement operation to dismantle a prolific transnational human smuggling organization operating in Nogales, Sonora, along the U.S.-Mexico border.</p> <p>The targeted human smuggling organization is alleged to be responsible for illegally smuggling large numbers of individuals from Mexico, Central America and South America into Arizona and other locations throughout the United States. The enforcement operation included the execution of six arrest warrants in Mexico for smuggling coordinators: Arturo Tienda-Garcia aka Tuercas, Jose Guadalupe Tienda-Garcia aka Pantera, Gilberto Escalante-Osuna aka Mochomo, Uriel Cruz-Tienda aka Quiqui, Cristal Tolentino-Hernandez, and Alfonso Sotelo-Contreras aka Pajaro.</p> <p>"The Attorney General established Joint Task Force Alpha to address the threat posed by transnational human smuggling networks, and this operation is a prime example of its impact," said Assistant Attorney General Kenneth A. Polite Jr. of the Justice Department's Criminal Division. "JTFA marshals the investigative and prosecutorial resources of the department, and its law enforcement partners, to target human smugglers and enhances coordination in transnational law enforcement efforts to better combat these criminal organizations."</p>

“Border security is less about erecting barriers between nations, and more about increasing cooperation among neighbors,” said U.S. Attorney Gary Restaino for the District of Arizona. “This operation is a stellar example of what can be accomplished when U.S. and Mexican authorities work together across the border. For years, these individuals have violated the laws of the United States and Mexico with impunity, and their apprehension will make citizens of both countries safer.”

“HSI-Phoenix is grateful for its collaboration with HSI Mexico City and their partnership with the Government of Mexico,” said Special Agent in Charge Scott Brown of HSI-Phoenix. “These joint efforts demonstrate the commitment of both of our nations to not let borders be barriers when it comes to confronting the transnational criminal organizations that negatively impact both of our nations.”

U.S. authorities provided assistance to the Mexico Attorney General’s Office through coordination under Joint Task Force Alpha, which was established by Attorney General Merrick B. Garland in June 2021 to marshal the investigative and prosecutorial resources of the Department of Justice, in partnership with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), to enhance U.S. enforcement efforts against the most prolific and dangerous human smuggling and trafficking groups operating in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. The task force focuses on disrupting and dismantling smuggling and trafficking networks that abuse, exploit and endanger migrants, pose national security threats or are involved in organized crime.

The U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Arizona has also prosecuted other U.S.-based coordinators and operators with ties to the smuggling organization, including Benjamin Gallegos, Amalia Gonzalez-Lara, Sergio Vazquez-Flores, Macario Ulises Barragan-Cisneros, Jaziel Tienda-Ibarra, Daniel Garcia-Salgado, Cesar Bermeo-Diaz, Isamar Chaparro-Vizcarra and Oswaldo Tienda-Castro. These nine individuals have been convicted of conspiracy to transport and harbor illegal aliens for profit. Additional alleged coordinators for the organization have been indicted by a federal grand jury on alien smuggling charges including Enrique Villalobos-Lopez and Ian Esteban Serrano.

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HEADLINE	03/10 Mexico cartel death threats fall from the sky
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/bvn3ea/cjng-cartel-planes-death-threat-flyers
GIST	<p>CIUDAD JUÁREZ, Mexico — Thousands of printed flyers were dropped from a Cessna airplane in broad daylight this week over a small village in the Mexican state of Jalisco in an unusual propaganda strategy for the country’s drug cartels.</p> <p>A video shared on social media shows a small airplane flying in a clear sky over the village of Teocaltiche and launching thousands of flyers, which flutter down onto the streets.</p> <p>The paper rain brought with it the announcement of a new war between the powerful Jalisco New Generation Cartel (known by its Spanish initials as the CJNG) and the Sinaloa Cartel. Addressed to the people of Teocaltiche, the flyers assured “civilians and authorities” that “the fight is not against you, but against an age-old enemy.”</p> <p>Over the last five years, the CJNG, run by Nemesio “El Mencho” Oseguera, has been in a bloody fight against one of its main rivals in Mexico, the Sinaloa Cartel.</p> <p>Jalisco, and two other states bordering Teocaltiche, Zacatecas and Aguascalientes, are at the center of the war between these two criminal organizations that has killed hundreds and displaced thousands.</p> <p>The dropped leaflet, signed at the bottom with the CJNG initials over a Mexican flag, named an alleged Sinaloa Cartel member, blaming him and the cartel’s hitmen for extortion and homicides in the region.</p> <p>“We are cleaning up the region,” said the flyer.</p> <p>Teocaltiche’s mayor, Juan Manuel Vallejo Pedroza, decided to cancel classes for all schools following the drop, according to local news reports.</p>

	<p>Mexican drug cartels have occasionally used this publicity strategy in the past. In 2012, an airplane dropped a message over Culiacán, the capital of the state of Sinaloa, accusing the governor at the time of of “working for ‘El Chapo’ Guzmán.”</p> <p>In recent months, CJNG has turned up the volume on its propaganda, hanging banners from busy bridges, posting videos online flexing its fire power and using several accounts on all social media platforms to share victories.</p> <p>The Jalisco Cartel has been taking on the Sinaloa Cartel in several Mexican states as it looks to expand its turf. News stories have recently identified seven states as the most violent in Mexico where both cartels have strong presence: Zacatecas, Guanajuato, Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Morelos, and most recently Michoacán, where the Jalisco Cartel killed several people during a funeral service.</p> <p>The execution happened in broad daylight on a public street in San José de Gracia, about 350 miles from Mexico City, and a video from the attack showed a dozen people lined up outside a house with their backs to the wall and their hands over their faces before a blast of firearms sounds. Their bodies have yet to be found.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 DOJ: \$8B tied to Covid aid fraud
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/us-policy/2022/03/10/justice-department-coronavirus-aid-fraud/
GIST	<p>Since the U.S. government first marshaled its historic economic response to the coronavirus pandemic, the Justice Department has uncovered a vast array of alleged fraud, resulting in charges and investigations involving more than \$8 billion in federal aid.</p> <p>The figures, revealed by the agency on Thursday, prompted the DOJ to redouble its enforcement efforts — chiefly through the appointment of a new director now tasked to carry out President Biden’s mission to pursue “the criminals who stole billions in relief money.”</p> <p>The extent of the fraud alleged and uncovered by the Justice Department is vast, touching nearly every major facet of the roughly \$6 trillion that Congress adopted over a two-year period to support families, workers and businesses.</p> <p>In some of the cases, suspects wrongfully obtained federal loans to bolster companies that did not actually exist. In others, large, transnational crime syndicates stole workers’ identities to receive generous unemployment benefits under someone else’s name. And in a series of additional allegations that struck at the very heart of Americans’ pandemic anxieties, federal officials charged a litany of actors who promised tests, which proved faulty, or cures that turned out to be fake — then at times submitted fake Medicare claims to the government for reimbursement.</p> <p>Yet the shady schemes and other crimes reported by the Justice Department also reflected a potentially significant undercount. Federal officials on Thursday could tally only the cases and charges already brought or closed — not the tens of billions of dollars still under review. The looming threat of further criminal activity prompted Attorney General Merrick Garland to stress in a statement Thursday the government would use “every available federal tool” to pursue such fraud.</p> <p>“We will continue to hold accountable those who seek to exploit the pandemic for personal gain, to protect vulnerable populations, and to safeguard the integrity of taxpayer-funded programs,” he said.</p> <p>To that end, top DOJ officials on Thursday introduced Kevin Chambers, currently an associate deputy attorney general, as the agency’s new director for covid-19 fraud enforcement. The announcement arrived just over a week after Biden promised to create such a position during his first State of the Union address. The White House coupled its calls for the position with a pledge that it would lead a broader campaign to ferret out fraud, including a push on Capitol Hill to toughen penalties against those who stole large sums from the government.</p>

Chambers is set to augment existing work at the DOJ, which last year created a special task force to investigate misuse in coronavirus funds. His effort aims to focus on larger-scale criminal activity, including the widespread use of identity theft and the attempts to steal federal money that originated from abroad. The DOJ said his first priority is to establish special “strike teams,” which the White House previously explained would rely on “state-of-the-art data analytics” to mine for potential wrongdoing across the country’s full spectrum of stimulus spending.

The heightened enforcement reflects a dawning realization in Washington that its massive burst in spending over the past two years saved the economy yet [came at a cost](#): It rescued the country from the worst crisis since the Great Depression, even as it forced the lumbering government to move at such uncharacteristic speed that it may have distributed money erroneously.

The promise and peril are laid bare in a series of stories by The Washington Post, which found agencies including the [Small Business Administration](#) for years failed to put in place key checks to keep watch over its aid programs. The SBA’s own inspector general at times has warned about as much as [\\$80 billion in fraud](#) affecting the agency alone, warning in public reports and congressional testimony recently that it could take years to find and recover the funds.

Many of the government watchdogs overseeing the money also face significant resource constraints. Major federal oversight agencies essentially received about \$1 in new money for about every \$12,000 in coronavirus stimulus spending, a Post analysis of the data showed. Meanwhile, federal systems to keep track of how much has been spent, and who has received it, have suffered from significant, persistent data gaps two years into the pandemic — troubling lawmakers from both parties on Capitol Hill.

Those concerns about transparency and oversight loomed large as Congress considered another burst of spending this week in response to the pandemic. As the Biden administration this month sought new aid to prepare for a potentially worsening pandemic, three dozen Senate Republicans demanded a fuller accounting of the roughly \$6 trillion that Congress already had approved. They cited The Post’s reporting, demanding more transparency as negotiators on Capitol Hill cobbled together a broader spending package to fund the government.

Lawmakers settled on \$15 billion in aid to boost testing, therapeutics and vaccines, an amount tied to Republican-sought provisions that sourced the money from other past pandemic programs. But an 11th-hour fight over the financing soured the debate and forced Democrats to jettison the money entirely from their [\\$1.5 trillion deal](#) — allowing it to pass the House late Wednesday albeit without a tranche of money the White House has described as critical.

In the meantime, the Justice Department on Thursday detailed the full scope of its labors to keep watch over the money Congress already approved. It said it brought criminal charges against more than 1,000 defendants, with alleged losses in pandemic relief exceeding \$1.1 billion. It also opened 240 civil investigations into more than 1,800 individuals and entities specifically involving pandemic loans, with alleged misconduct totaling more than \$6 billion.

The largest bucket includes initiatives known as the Paycheck Protection Program and the Economic Injury Disaster Loan, two SBA-led efforts that provided billions of dollars in potentially forgivable assistance to smaller firms. The DOJ and other federal authorities said they seized an additional \$1 billion in EIDL loan proceeds, some of which stemmed from suspects who applied for the funds on behalf of shell companies or firms that did not actually exist.

In one such case last March, a judge [sentenced](#) a 55-year-old man in Coppell, Tex., for seeking \$24.8 million in PPP loans to assist businesses that actually did not have any employees. He falsified tax documents, federal officials said at the time, and created bank statements showing wages that were never paid to workers. The suspect then used the proceeds to “buy a fleet of luxury cars,” including a Bentley convertible, a Corvette Stingray and a Porsche Macan.

	<p>In a more recent example, a judge sentenced a 31-year-old man in Georgia for trying to defraud the government to obtain small-business aid from the SBA, which he then used in part to buy a Pokémon trading card for more than \$57,000. The suspect had to forfeit the Charizard card, the DOJ said.</p> <p>The U.S. government also grappled with unprecedented identity theft involving the nation's unemployment insurance program, which had been boosted to provide historically large sums and expanded to cover new categories of workers, including those who work in the gig economy. The DOJ said Thursday that federal officials had charged more than 430 defendants in these and other unemployment fraud-related cases.</p> <p>The agency did not provide a dollar amount, but other outside estimates recently have warned the number is expansive — and growing. One report from the Government Accountability Office identified at least \$2.3 billion in unemployment fraud as of last fall, but it warned the number is likely outdated and understated, since it did not include ongoing investigations that “may take a long time” to complete.</p> <p>The widespread trouble stemmed in part from high-profile data breaches that left Americans' information vulnerable on the “dark web.” The growing concern prompted the White House last week to announce a forthcoming executive order, aiming to “prevent and detect identity theft involving public benefits” broadly.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 DA: no murder charge Denver rally shooting
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/10/us/denver-security-guard-charges-dropped.html
GIST	<p>Prosecutors said on Thursday that they planned to drop a second-degree murder charge against a former security guard for a Denver television news station who fatally shot a man in a confrontation after a right-wing rally in 2020.</p> <p>A spokeswoman for the Denver district attorney's office said that prosecutors were not able to overcome claims by the former guard, Matthew Dolloff, that he had acted in “self-defense or defense of others” when he shot Lee John Keltner, 49, at the conclusion of a “patriot muster” rally on Oct. 10, 2020.</p> <p>Mr. Dolloff had argued that he was defending himself and a reporter for 9News, a Denver news channel, which said that it had hired him as a private security guard.</p> <p>“Having fully considered the facts and circumstances surrounding the charges, today we informed Lee Keltner's family members that we will soon dismiss the criminal case against Matthew Dolloff,” the spokeswoman for the district attorney's office, Carolyn A. Tyler, said in a statement.</p> <p>“In line with our ethical obligations, we cannot overcome the legal justifications of self-defense or defense of others,” she said. “We are not able to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.”</p> <p>Mr. Dolloff did not face any other charges in the case, according to his lawyer, Doug Richards.</p> <p>“I am very pleased that the D.A. has finally recognized what we have known all along: that Matt was clearly defending himself and the 9News reporter,” Mr. Richards said in an interview.</p> <p>The Denver news channel said on the afternoon of the protest that Mr. Dolloff had been hired as a private security guard and that it had been “the practice of 9News for a number of months to hire private security to protect staff at protests.”</p> <p>A lawyer who has represented Mr. Keltner's family did not immediately respond to an email and a phone call on Thursday night.</p> <p>The shooting happened as protesters left the rally and encountered left-wing counterprotesters south of Civic Center Park, near the Denver Art Museum.</p>

	<p>According to an arrest warrant, Mr. Keltner had been arguing with another man near the park.</p> <p>Mr. Keltner abruptly broke off that argument and confronted Mr. Dolloff. Moments later, Mr. Keltner struck Mr. Dolloff on the side of the head with his hand. Mr. Dolloff drew a gun from his waistband, aimed and fired a single shot as Mr. Keltner discharged a Mace-like substance, the police said.</p> <p>The fatal encounter was captured in videos and photographs that circulated widely in news reports and on social media.</p> <p>Mr. Keltner collapsed to the ground and the police arrested Mr. Dolloff, who was still holding a semiautomatic handgun, according to the arrest warrant. Photographs from the scene showed Mr. Dolloff laying the gun on the ground and putting his hands in the air as the police moved toward him.</p> <p>Mr. Keltner was taken to Denver Health Medical Center, where he was pronounced dead, the police said. The medical examiner ruled Mr. Keltner's death a homicide, according to the district attorney's office, which charged Mr. Dolloff with second-degree murder in October 2020.</p> <p>Mr. Dolloff, 32, had pleaded not guilty during an arraignment last year, and his case was set to go trial on April 12, Mr. Richards said. If convicted, he would have faced a mandatory prison sentence of between 16 and 48 years, prosecutors said. Mr. Richards said that prosecutors planned to formally dismiss the case on March 21.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Judge: some defendants go free after arrest
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/king-county-presiding-judge-explains-why-some-defendants-go-free-after-arrest
GIST	<p>When police make an arrest and prosecutors push to hold the person in jail there are times when judges decide to let those defendants go free. On occasion, some of those people who return to the streets commit a new crime before prosecutors file charges on the previous offense.</p> <p>KOMO News spoke with Judge Patrick Oishi, the presiding judge of King County Superior Court, to understand how those decision are made.</p> <p>Examples have come up in recent weeks where people arrested for potentially felony crimes get released the next day on the promise they'll show up for court, which is known as personal recognizance.</p> <p>It happened with some of the people taken into custody at 12th and Jackson during Operation New Day. A prolific shoplifting suspect seen on video pushing a large-screen television out of Target was taken into custody only to be set free the next day.</p> <p>"They get arrested for what should be a felony and then the next day they are out here being a nuisance again doing the same things," said Mande Gartland, a retail store manager who routinely deals with shoplifters.</p> <p>The courts have a lot of factors to consider when prosecutors ask to keep people in jail, and Oishi said that process always starts the same.</p> <p>"The presumption is release," Oishi said.</p> <p>From there, Oishi said judges look at whether the person is a danger to the community, how likely they are to return to court and whether they might interfere with the administration of justice. Even if one of those risks is found, bail can only be set as a last resort if no other conditions will work.</p> <p>"We still need to look at the least restrictive conditions possible," Oishi said.</p>

When asked if past failures to appear should be an automatic disqualifier for personal recognizance, Oishi said it's not that simple.

"It's one factor of many that the rule allows us to consider," Oishi said.

When a bartender got slashed in the face after asking a man to show his proof of vaccination card, Seattle police spent weeks tracking him down only to see him released the next day by a judge.

"After they get him they just release him? That just made no sense to me," said the bartender, Felicite Ogilvy.

Oishi said ethics rules and other considerations prevent judges from commenting on pending cases but he emphasized that crimes of violence and a defendant's history are rigorously examined.

"That's something a judge does always consider," he said.

Staff at King County District Court, which handles first appearances on felony crimes, sent KOMO News a statement.

The Washington State Supreme Court has established rules that govern how judges must handle people who have been arrested. It is crucial to remember that these rules are intended to preserve the constitutional rights of people within the criminal justice system, including the constitutional right to a presumption of innocence. In some instances, the matter before the court on a felony first appearance is whether to hold someone who has been accused of a crime, but has not yet been charged.

The court rules that District Court judges must follow for felony first appearance hearings require a person's mandatory release for non-capital offenses unless the Court determines that such release: (1) will not assure the person's appearance at future hearings, or (2) when there is shown a likely danger that the person will commit a violent crime, seek to intimidate witnesses, or interfere with the administration of justice. Even if one of those risks is found, the rules allow bail only as a last resort if no other conditions are sufficient.

It is also important to understand in a felony first appearance hearing, the judge must make a decision based on the facts presented in a short narrative and based on the available information unique to the alleged circumstances of a particular case. Further, judges must remain neutral and cannot conduct their own investigations. Instead, judges only can consider relevant information and evidence that is brought before them by the prosecutor and defense attorney, which might be less detailed than what is subsequently presented after an individual has been charged.

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HEADLINE	03/10 Belltown apartment fire intentional; injuries
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/man-left-in-critical-condition-two-others-injured-after-belltown-apartment-fire
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Three people were given medical attention and one was taken to the hospital after an apartment fire early Thursday in Belltown.</p> <p>The fire call came in around 2:40 a.m. in the 2200 block of 1st Avenue, at the Bell Tower apartments. The Seattle Housing Authority runs the apartment.</p> <p>Seattle firefighters say a man in the bathroom lobby was found and rushed to a hospital in critical condition.</p> <p>The other two patients, a 68-year-old man and a 52-year-old woman, were taken care of at the scene.</p> <p>The fire department brought in a Metro bus to keep people warm until they can get back into their homes.</p>

	Seattle police later confirmed this fire was intentionally set.
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HEADLINE	03/10 Court axes 'lustful disposition' doctrine
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/wa-supreme-court-axes-lustful-disposition-doctrine-in-sexual-assault-cases-calling-it-archaic-harmful/
GIST	<p>For over 100 years in Washington, prosecutors have been able to introduce evidence in sexual assault trials under a doctrine known as “lustful disposition.”</p> <p>If, courts have ruled, past contact between a defendant and an alleged victim demonstrates the defendant’s “lustful disposition,” it can be cited as evidence, even if the defendant wasn’t charged for that contact and even if it wasn’t criminal.</p> <p>On Thursday, the Washington Supreme Court ruled that state courts may no longer use the doctrine, calling the term “archaic” and “outdated” and saying it reinforces harmful myths about sexual violence that “improperly focus on the victim.”</p> <p>“The term ‘lustful disposition’ perpetuates outdated rape myths that sexual assault, including child sex abuse, results from an uncontrollable sexual urge or a sexual need that is not met,” Justice Raquel Montoya-Lewis wrote for the court.</p> <p>The case at hand, State of Washington v. Crossguns, involved charges of child sexual abuse. At trial, prosecutors presented evidence about not only the charged offenses but also that the defendant, Patrick Crossguns Sr., had previously abused the victim. The trial court had ruled to allow the testimony because it could prove Crossguns’ “lustful disposition toward” the child.</p> <p>Crossguns was convicted of second-degree rape of a child and second-degree child molestation.</p> <p>Crossguns appealed, arguing, among other things, that testimony about prior, uncharged acts should not have been allowed.</p> <p>Generally, evidence of a person’s character is not allowed to be used to prove that in the alleged crime the person acted in accordance with their character. There are many exceptions, including if the evidence speaks to a defendant’s motive, opportunity, intent or plan.</p> <p>And, until Thursday, if the evidence spoke to a defendant’s “lustful disposition,” it was fair game.</p> <p>The state Supreme Court ruled to get rid of the “lustful disposition” doctrine but ruled that in Crossguns’ case, the evidence was properly allowed, for other reasons, including that it showed evidence of “a planning and intent involved in building a relationship with the child victim.”</p> <p>The court was unanimous in axing the “lustful disposition” doctrine but was split 7-2 on whether the specific evidence in Crossguns’ case should have been allowed.</p> <p>The seven-justice majority wrote that the reasons for allowing the evidence in this case were almost directly contrary to what is implied by “lustful disposition.” In doing so, the majority’s opinion seeks to correct misperceptions, and a number of the court’s own past opinions, that focus on sexual attraction and desire rather than sexual violence.</p> <p>The majority allowed the evidence in this case, they wrote, because it shows “grooming” and “planning,” concepts “in contradiction with the idea that ‘lust’ is an overwhelming motivator and almost impervious to planning.”</p>

Although it had been in use in Washington for the last century, the “lustful disposition” doctrine dates back much further, to church courts in England that dealt with charges of adultery. If two adults could be shown to have a “lustful disposition” toward one another, the thinking went, they were more likely to have committed the offense of adultery.

Such principles were then imported to colonial courts. They remain in use in many states, although no longer for adultery.

In nixing its use in Washington, the Supreme Court wrote that the term “reinforces the myth of the pathological, crazed rapist who is a stranger to the victim.”

“The term ‘lustful disposition’ is an outmoded, inaccurate term that reinforces myths about sexual assault,” the court wrote. “We abandon this term because it is incorrect and harmful.”

This is not the first time that the state Supreme Court in recent years has sought to overturn its own “harmful” precedents.

In June 2020, the nine justices wrote [an open letter to the state’s legal community](#), calling on them to work harder to dismantle the legal system’s legacy of systemic racism.

“We cannot undo this wrong — but we can recognize our ability to do better in the future,” they wrote.

Later that summer, the court overturned a more than 100-year-old Supreme Court ruling about Yakama fishing rights that [explicitly rejected tribal sovereignty](#).

“We cannot forget our own history, and we cannot change it,” Montoya-Lewis wrote in that case. “We can, however, forge a new path forward, committing to justice as we do so.”

And several months after that, in a totally unrelated case, the Supreme Court took the opportunity to apologize for [its 60-year-old decision that a cemetery could bar a Black family from burying their dead son](#) because of his race.

The old decision, which condemned civil rights and integration, was “incorrect and harmful,” [the court wrote](#). It was an example “of the unfortunate role we have played.”

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HEADLINE	03/10 Pierce Co. police shootings jump
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article259163318.html
GIST	<p>Police in Pierce County have shot seven people so far this year, a significant jump from previous years.</p> <p>That follows a national trend from 2021, which saw the highest total of fatal police shootings since at least 2015.</p> <p>Law enforcement officials said it’s hard to figure out why police shootings are up but suggested an uptick in violent crime and legislation that changed policing could play a role.</p> <p>“It’s been a perfect storm,” said Pierce County sheriff’s Sgt. Darren Moss.</p> <p>By this time last year, there had been two police shootings in the county. In the same time period in 2020, there had been one.</p> <p>In 2021, there were seven police shootings in Pierce County and one incident where a Tacoma police officer drove through a crowd and struck seven people. There were at least 12 local police shootings in 2020.</p>

The statistics seem to suggest that public scrutiny and efforts made by lawmakers to reduce these types of incidents have not been as successful as hoped.

Nationwide, police shot and killed at least 1,055 people last year, according to The Washington Post. That's up from 1,021 shootings in 2020 and 999 in 2019.

That the number of fatal police shootings last year is within 60 of the average suggests officers' behavior has not shifted significantly since The Post began collecting data in 2015, said Andrew Wheeler, a private-sector criminologist and data scientist.

"I think the data is pretty consistent that there've been no major changes in policing, at least in terms of these officer-involved shooting deaths," Wheeler told The Post.

SIX OF SEVEN WERE FATAL

Six of the seven police shootings that have happened in Pierce County this year were fatal. Medical examiners ruled one of those six a suicide.

Investigators say a man suspected of fatally shooting his girlfriend led deputies on a pursuit Jan. 9 then shot himself in the head when cornered near Buckley. Deputies heard the gunshot and returned fire, though none of their bullets hit him.

In another case, sheriff's deputies shot at an armed child-rape suspect while trying to arrest him in Chehalis but did not hit him. The suspect was fatally shot later that day by Centralia police after he allegedly stabbed an officer. The Lewis County Sheriff's Office is investigating both of those police shootings.

The Pierce County Sheriff's Department has been involved in four of this year's shootings. Tacoma police have shot two people, and Puyallup police shot one.

In at least four of the police shootings, investigators said the person shot was armed. Another allegedly struck a deputy with a van.

Details on the other two shootings have not been released, and investigators have not said why officers fired their weapons.

The Jan. 9 shooting in Buckley is the only police shooting case that has been closed, even though the involved deputies were not identified. The Sheriff's Department will do an internal review to determine if the deputies violated any policies or procedures.

NO MAJOR UPTICK IN SHOOTINGS IN 2021

Although police shootings nationwide increased last year, there was no major uptick in Pierce County.

Local law enforcement officers shot seven people. Four of the cases were fatal, though medical examiners ruled one to be a suicide.

Three cases are still being investigated. They include a sheriff's deputy who fatally shot an armed man in Graham, a trooper who fatally shot a suspect in Fife after the suspect allegedly led officers on a high speed chase in a stolen car and struck a patrol car, and a Lakewood sergeant who fatally shot a man after he allegedly opened fire on police.

Prosecutors are reviewing the other four police shootings to determine whether the involved officers or deputies were justified in firing their weapons.

In five of the police shootings from 2021, investigators said the people shot were armed with weapons. Two others involved suspects accused of either driving into deputies or driving into a patrol car.

Then there's the case of Tacoma officer Khanh Phan, who responded to a street-racing call downtown Jan. 23 and drove through a crowd of people. Investigators found he struck seven pedestrians and ran over one man, who suffered a partially collapsed lung and leg pain.

INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATIONS NOW REQUIRED

The way police shootings are investigated in Washington state changed two years ago.

That's when the Law Enforcement and Community Safety Act, once known as Initiative 940, went into effect. The law requires independent investigations in incidents where police use of force results in death or serious injury.

Before, local police agencies would investigate each other when officers shot someone. That sometimes prompted public outcry from those who believe police cannot objectively investigate officers they work alongside or who they know might one day investigate them.

Now, the Pierce County Force Investigation Team takes over in such incidents, and three independent investigations are launched simultaneously.

PCFIT conducts a criminal investigation, the Prosecutor's Office independently monitors the investigation to ensure it is open, accurate, and appropriate, and the Medical Examiner's Office determines the details of what caused the death and what factors contributed to it. PCFIT has investigated 17 police use of force cases since the law went into effect Jan. 6, 2020.

Even newer legislation created the Washington State Office of Independent Investigations, which will eventually replace law enforcement investigations when police use deadly force.

Few details have been released about how the office will operate, but an 11-member advisory board was appointed in November.

Regional teams are expected to respond to the scenes of deadly police force within one hour to secure the scene and process evidence. All members will be taught the history of racism in policing, tribal sovereignty, implicit and explicit bias, intercultural competency, racial-equity lens, anti-racism and undoing institutional racism.

Investigators must be at least two years removed from professional ties with law enforcement and will be trained by the state's Criminal Justice Training Commission.

State officials have said they hope to have the office running by summer.

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HEADLINE	03/10 Jussie Smollett jailed 150 days: hoax attack
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/empire-actor-jussie-smollett-sentenced-racist-hoax-attack/story?id=83363799
GIST	<p>Former "Empire" actor Jussie Smollett has been sentenced to 150 days in county jail on Thursday for fabricating a 2019 hate crime attack on himself.</p> <p>Smollett was also ordered to pay \$120,000 in restitution to the city of Chicago, fined \$25,000 and must serve 30 months of felony probation.</p> <p>As Cook County Judge James Linn was imposing a sentence, Smollett screamed out, "I am not suicidal. I am innocent."</p> <p>The judge ordered Smollett to be taken to jail immediately.</p> <p>Smollett's courtroom outburst came after he declined an opportunity to speak on the advice of his attorneys, who said he has to consider appellate issues.</p>

"I respect you and the jury, but I did not do this. And if anything happens to me when I go in there, I did not do it to myself," he continued. He left court with his fist raised in the air.

During sentencing, Linn repeatedly called Smollett, "narcissistic, selfish and arrogant."

The judge cited several aggravating factors in deciding the sentence, including Smollett's testimony in his own defense.

"This can only be described as pure perjury," Linn told Smollett.

He also said Smollett's crimes were "premeditated to the extreme," another aggravating factor.

The judge said he believes Smollett has harmed real hate crime victims, who may now be apprehensive about coming forward.

Linn noted Smollett's volunteer work in civil rights and LGBTQ issues, but added, "You're just a charlatan pretending to be the victim of a hate crime."

Smollett, 39, appeared in Cook County Circuit Court in Chicago to hear his fate after a jury convicted him in December on five of six felony counts of disorderly conduct stemming from him filing a false police report and lying to police, who spent more than \$130,000 investigating his allegations.

Prior to the sentencing, Linn denied Smollett's motion for a new trial following a lengthy hearing.

"We've talked about this for two years," Linn said. "I do believe that at the end of the day, Mr. Smollett received a fair trial."

Smollett's lawyers said they will appeal.

During Smollett's trial, the actor testified in his own defense, maintaining his story that he was assaulted on the street by two masked men, who put a noose around his neck and shouted homophobic slurs and the words "MAGA country" in an apparent reference to former President Donald Trump's motto "Make America Great Again."

"There was no hoax," Smollett testified.

The openly gay actor told police that on Jan. 29, 2019, he was walking on a street near his Chicago apartment around 2 a.m. when he was set upon by two men. The attackers allegedly shouted racist and homophobic slurs before hitting him, pouring "an unknown chemical substance" on him and wrapping a rope around his neck.

Chicago police said Smollett's story of being the victim of an attack began to unravel when investigators tracked down two men, brothers Abimbola and Olabinjo Osundairo, who they said were seen in a security video near where Smollett claimed he was assaulted and around the same time it supposedly occurred.

The Osundairo brothers testified during Smollett's trial that the actor paid them \$3,500 to help him orchestrate and stage the crime.

In a stunning move, Cook County District Attorney Kim Foxx's office initially dropped all charges against Smollett in March 2019 despite acknowledging Smollett fabricated the street attack on himself in a bizarre attempt to get a pay raise.

Prior to the decision to drop the charges, Foxx recused herself from the Smollett probe after it surfaced that she had been in touch with Smollett's family. She left the decision on the disposition of the case to Joe Magats, the first assistant state attorney in Cook County.

	<p>As part of an agreement with prosecutors, Smollett forfeited 10% of a \$100,000 bond and preemptively completed community service prior to the charges being dropped.</p> <p>"The criminal conviction of Jussie Smollett by a jury of his peers and today's sentencing should send a clear message to everyone in the City of Chicago that false claims and allegations will not be tolerated," Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot said in a statement. "The city feels vindicated in today's ruling that he is being held accountable and that we will appropriately receive restitution for his actions."</p>
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